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Vital Breathings

Breath, Voice, and the Culture of Air in Coleridge and Tennyson

Vital Breathings:
Breath, Voice, and the Culture of Air in Coleridge and Tennyson

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that the notion of breath and breathing in the literary work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and some of their contemporaries, is more complex than previously recognised, and is grounded in the scientific and cultural developments of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Chapter 1 establishes a scientific and cultural context for the chapters that follow, whilst also determining the prevalent themes of this study, including the relationship between breath and thought, the symbiotic respiratory relationship of the natural world, technological and medical advances, giving or taking voice, and the contrasting qualities of substantiality and insubstantiality of breath. Chapter 2 is concerned with cycles, meeting points and exchanges of breath in Coleridge's writing, and focuses primarily on his conversation poems, 'To William Wordsworth', and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Chapter 3 is an examination of Coleridge the talker, and presents a physiological and psychological explanation for why Coleridge talked so continuously. Chapter 4 offers a detailed reading of the reciprocal breathing relationship in *In Memoriam*, arguing that Tennyson's particular engagement with forms of resuscitation and ventriloquism reflects and emphasises the paradox of circular and forward movement inherent in mourning and elegy. Chapter 5 argues that breath, ubiquitous in *Idylls of the King* in various forms of speech, is paradoxically insubstantial yet powerful; the atmosphere of rumour becomes increasingly substantial to the point that breathing becomes difficult, and the purpose of verbal commemoration is questioned in a world where words can no longer be trusted. Ultimately, this thesis argues that literary attentions to breath, in this period, are engaged with, and influenced by, the wealth of scientific development and concomitant cultural awareness, meaning that breathing is, in the work of Coleridge and Tennyson, compound, substantiated, and symbiotic.

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Writing this thesis has been a bumpy ride, but I am more grateful than I can say to everyone who has offered generous support and thoughtful advice along the way – there are far more names on this list than I have space to write here. My greatest thanks are to my supervisors, Ralph Pite and Jane Wright, for their invaluable support during the course of this thesis – I have enjoyed every meeting with them immensely, and their attention to detail and thoughtful feedback have helped to shape this thesis in every way. I would also like to thank Samantha Matthews and Jessica Fay, who both offered constructive suggestions during the upgrade process. I am grateful to everyone in the English Department at Bristol; and, in particular, Ad Putter for his help and advice over the years. I also owe a huge amount to Francesco Manzini for his generous enthusiasm and support on the road to completion.

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Finally, I would like to thank the University of Bristol for not only allowing me to go, but supporting me in heading out into the ocean part-way through my studies – the experience of being 'alone on a wide, wide sea' has undoubtedly provided me with fresh perspectives on everything, and I returned to this research with renewed vigour. To everyone who supported and encouraged me in that venture: thank you – there will be more to follow.

Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: DATE:

Contents

List of Illustrations

Abbreviations

CL	*Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71)
CN	*The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* ed. by Kathleen Coburn, 5 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957-2002)
CP	*The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works,* ed. by J. C. C. Mays, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)
IM	*Tennyson: In Memoriam*, ed. by Susan Shatto and Marion Shaw (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982)
TP	*The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. by Christopher Ricks, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1987)
TT	*The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Table Talk,* ed. by Carl Woodring, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990)

Note on Style and Texts

Coleridge
Unless otherwise stated, all quotation of Coleridge's poetry is taken from the 'Reading Texts' of *CP*; line numbers appear in parentheses in the text.

All quotation of the text of Coleridge's notebooks is taken from *CN*; references, which are to Coburn's chronological entry numbers (instead of page numbers), are found in the footnotes. Coburn's companion volumes of notes are identified by the addition 'Notes' after the volume number.

Tennyson
Unless otherwise stated, all quotation of *In Memoriam* is taken from *IM*; line numbers appear in parentheses in the text.

Unless otherwise stated, quotation of all other poetry by Tennyson is taken from *TP*; line numbers appear in parentheses in the text.

Other
All quotation of plays by William Shakespeare is taken from *Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

All quotation of the Bible is taken from *The Holy Bible*, *Authorized King James Version* (New York: Collins' ClearType Press, 1959).

Throughout this thesis I indicate quotation of footnotes by the addition of 'n' after the page number (e.g.: 'p. 10n').

*

Part of an earlier version of Chapter 5 appeared on the *Life of Breath* Blog in 2016, as 'Arthur's "labouring of the lungs" in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*': <https://lifeofbreath.org/2016/04/arthurs-labouring-of-the-lungs-in-tennysons-idylls-of-the-king/>.

INTRODUCTION

William Wordsworth's 1805 version of *The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet's Mind; An Autobiographical Poem* memorably opens with the poet being welcomed back into the natural world by the air that is blowing from it:

> Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze,
> That blows from the green fields and from the clouds
> And from the sky: it beats against my cheek,
> And seems half conscious of the joy it gives.
> O welcome Messenger! O welcome Friend!
> A Captive greets thee, coming from a house
> Of bondage, from yon City's walls set free,
> A prison where he hath been long immured. (I. 1-8)[1]

Meeting this 'gentle breeze', the poet pauses to 'breathe again', which causes 'trances of thought and mountings of the mind' to 'come fast upon' him (I. 19-21). He also realises that, 'while the sweet breath of Heaven | Was blowing on [his] body', he:

> felt within
> A corresponding mild creative breeze,
> A vital breeze which travell'd gently on
> O'er things which it had made, and is become
> A tempest, a redundant energy,
> Vexing its own creation. (I. 41-47)

The 'gentle breeze' of the opening line of the poem brings inspiration; feeling it on his skin, the poet finds that he can 'breathe again', thus stirring an inner 'mild creative breeze'. As Ronald Gaskell observes, 'what this inner, metaphorical (but not just metaphorical) breeze is, Wordsworth does not need to tell us: the idea of poetry as inspiration […] goes back to Plato'.[2]

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[1] William Wordsworth, *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. by Mark L. Reed, 2 vols (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), I, 107. All further references to the 1805 *Prelude* are from this edition; line numbers are given in parentheses after the text.

[2] Ronald Gaskell, *Wordsworth's Poem of the Mind: an essay on* The Prelude (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), p. 63.

Breathing, primarily the act of respiration, also contains amongst its senses figurative influence or inspiration.[3] For example, lines of inspiration between poets can be imagined as the breath being, metaphorically, passed on. In the final stanza of *Adonais* (1821), Percy Bysshe Shelley states that, 'The breath whose might I have invoked in song | Descends on me', making explicit the suggestion of the passing on of poetic inspiration from the recently-deceased John Keats to Shelley himself (487-88).[4] Inspiration is, of course, etymologically related to breath (the Latin *spiritus* means both breath and spirit), and similar common roots can be found in other languages too (in Hebrew, *ruach* means breath, wind, and spirit, while the Greek *pneuma* means both breath and spirit/soul).[5] Breath, we can see, is concerned with both body and spirit, as well as with the breath of the world (the wind). The 'correspondent breeze' is a familiar concept in Romantic studies; M. H. Abrams has discussed how, 'often, in the major poems, the wind is not only a literal attribute of the landscape, but also a metaphor for a change in the poet's mind.'[6] Wordsworth's reference to breath in this passage from the *Prelude* is not just metaphorical, however; like the breeze, it is also literal.

Having been from 'yon City's walls set free' to a place where the air is fresh and 'blows from the green fields', the poet is able physically to breathe fully and freely. He is not only invoking a familiar trope (the poetic link between breath, spirit and inspiration), but is also articulating something culturally and physiologically central to the period. For this reason, and because of the deep connection that this work has with Coleridge, I return to the opening lines of the 1805 *Prelude* periodically throughout this

[3] 'breathing', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 20 March 2016].
[4] *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd edn (New York: Norton, 2002), p. 427; Shelley wrote to Byron that Keats had died 'in paroxysms of despair' due to 'the contemptuous attack on his book in the *Quarterly Review*'. Byron's response is more prosaic: 'I am sorry to hear what you say about Keats – is it actually true? I did not think criticism could be so killing' (both quoted in Michael O'Neill, *Shelley: A Literary Life* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1990), p. 146).
[5] See: M. H. Abrams, 'The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor', *The Kenyon Review*, 19 (1957), 113-130 (p. 121); G. Kim Blank and Fayez Lone, *Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley: A Study of Poetic Authority* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 194; Gaskell, p. 63.
[6] Abrams, p. 113.

thesis. The *Prelude* was initially written, and then revised and re-revised, in the wake of fervid experiments into the properties of the air and the relationship that human and animal breath has with the rest of the world. As I explain in Chapter 1, the health of air, and how it affected those who breathed it, was at the forefront of popular medical advice.

Breath is commonly recognised as a literary trope in the Romantic period and longer nineteenth century, but I suggest that it has become so normal to discuss it in such terms that it has almost become invisible to literary enquiry. By turning my attention to breath in this study, I demonstrate that the notion of breath and breathing in the literary work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and some of their contemporaries, is much more complex than previously recognised, and is grounded in the scientific and cultural developments of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Scientific advances and experiments offered multiple and compound ways of thinking and writing about the breath, and I argue that literature is attentive to this. It responds, particularly, to the recognition, in the late eighteenth century, that breathing might be thought of as a reciprocal activity, by which people are engaged in a symbiotic respiratory relationship with the world around them. The external, it was observed, interacts with the internal, such that the air that is breathed can affect thoughts, health, and poetic capacity. Throughout, I attend to the complexities of breath: to the symbiotic breathing of people with the wider world, to the nuances of the boundaries between life and death (which one might also consider as the physical and spiritual worlds), and to the notion that poetic inspiration also has physiological aspects. The 'vital Breathings' that Coleridge imagines as part of Wordsworth's creative process in 'To William Wordsworth', quoted in the title of this thesis (and addressed in Chapter 2), draw together all three of these qualities.

Breath is part of a range of physical processes bound to a body, yet the actual air that enters and exits that body via the mouth, throat and lungs seems devoid of solidity and is usually invisible to the naked eye. Something intangible is drawn down into the empty lungs, filling them and visibly expanding the chest, and, as the chest again falls, this air leaves the body and mingles with the rest of the air in the surrounding atmosphere. The act of breathing links the breathing person to the world: by breathing in, they breathe in the surrounding atmosphere, and they then breathe their breath out into this wider atmosphere again. The symbiotic nature of breathing means that the outside can affect the breathing person, and the breathing person can also have an effect on the external world. The in-breath can bring disease and it can aid health; it might help to fashion what one thinks and feels, and, most of all, it sustains life. The out-breath can be felt and heard or it can be almost soundless; it can be articulated into powerful words via the complex mechanism by which the impulsion of air into the larynx, through the vocal cords, then via articulators including the tongue, nose and mouth, generates sound waves; and it can even support life in others.[7] Scientific and cultural developments during the lives of Coleridge and Tennyson (for instance, advances in understanding about the role of green plants in making noxious air healthy and safe for humans to breathe again, as I discuss in Chapter 1) created far greater depth and complexity in understanding about the nature of breath and the process of breathing.

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While the foremost meaning of 'breath' is the 'air received into and expelled from the lungs in the act of respiration', other senses include: exhaled air (from someone's lungs, or, more broadly, from anything), something articulated or expressed in words,

[7] While this thesis is concerned with voice as an important characteristic of breath, the mechanics of speech are not central to my research.

and wind or 'air in motion'.[8] Breath, disembodied, literally becomes air. However, at what point this transformation happens is unclear: does breath become air immediately on leaving the body? how long does it remain associated with the person from whose lungs it has just exited? Edgar Allan Poe's 'Loss of Breath: A Tale Neither In Nor Out of "Blackwood"' (1832), a comic short story narrated by a man who literally loses his breath while shouting at his wife, asks the question: what might disembodied breath look like? The narrator finds that his 'breath was entirely gone. [He] could not have stirred with it a feather if [his] life had been at issue, or sullied even the delicacy of a mirror'. He begins to search for his breath in the room he was in when he lost it (ludicrously, he is able to continue to exist without breathing), and hopes that, 'concealed in some obscure corner, or lurking in some closet or drawer, might be found the lost object of [his] inquiry. It might have a vapoury – it might even have a tangible form'.[9] Actually, Poe's protagonist can only locate his physical possessions, and the breath is not one of them; what disembodied breath might look like necessarily remains a mystery in the story. This tension between the substantial and the insubstantial nature of breath runs through my thesis, as does the question of the potential agency of breath on leaving the body.

Poe's story describes an absurd situation in which his protagonist continues to live without breath (to the point that he could not have 'sullied even the delicacy of a mirror'). However, the presence or absence of breath is, historically, more usually imagined to create a divide between life and death; breath begins as life begins and the termination of one brings about the end of the other. King Lear memorably observes this seemingly unquestionable connection in relation to the body of Cordelia:

> I know when one is dead, and when one lives.

[8] 'breath', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 20 March 2016].
[9] Edgar Allan Poe, 'Loss of Breath: A Tale Neither In Nor Out of "Blackwood"', in *Comic Tales of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by Angus Wolfe Murray (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1973), pp. 79-96 (pp. 80; 81).

She's dead as earth.
[He lays her down]
Lend me a looking glass.
If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,
Why, then she lives. (V. 23. 256-59)[10]

For Lear, the presence of breath equals the presence of life. This connection between the two is often more intensely imagined in relation to first and last breaths, moments when life seems to begin and to end. Philosopher Havi Carel writes:

> Our first breath and last breath mark the beginning and end of life. A baby's first breath, noted by her cry, is a symbolic moment of joining humanity, with a voice propelled outwards by her tiny lungs. It is the breath of life. Here I am, she says. Hear me. Witness my efforts to communicate. The last breath is rasping, irregular, forced. Or it can be barely perceptible. It says: I am running out of breath which is a running out of life. And in between the first inhalation and last exhalation lies all of life[.][11]

For Carel, the first and final breaths are philosophical and metaphorical markers of a life. However, the scientific and medical reality of this link between life and breath is more complicated, and understanding about its limits and possibilities changed dramatically over the course of Coleridge's and Tennyson's lives (for example, as I show in Chapter 1, resuscitation and anaesthetics both challenged the perception that an apparently dead body was, categorically, dead). A first breath is, Lyall Watson articulates, 'Not the beginning of life, but such a clear transition that it is easy to understand why the ideas of life and breath and spirit and creation should have become so intertwined.'[12] In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the advent of breath memorably announces the beginning of the creature's life, even though it is not born in any traditional sense: 'I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a

[10] Shakespeare, *The History of King Lear*, pp. 909-41.
[11] Havi Carel, *Phenomenology of Illness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 128.
[12] Lyall Watson, *Heaven's Breath* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984), p. 367.

convulsive motion agitated its limbs'.[13] The creature's first breath is a clear beginning; the idea of breath equalling life remains compelling.

In 1851, Tennyson's first child was stillborn, having died during birth of strangulation from the umbilical cord.[14] In letters and a fragment of poetry written shortly after the tragedy, Tennyson reveals a sense of anxiety about the fact that the baby never actually took a breath and therefore could not be said properly to have lived, yet his writing also reveals a sense of confusion about this detail. In a letter to Robert Monteith he states that the baby 'was – not born, I cannot call it born for he never breathed – but he was released from the prison where he moved for nine months'.[15] The fragment of poetry similarly focuses on this absence of breath:

> Whate'er thou wert, whate'er thou art,
> Whose life was ended ere thy breath begun,
> Thou nine-months neighbour of my dear one's heart,
> And howsoe'er thou liest blind and mute,
> Thou lookest bold and resolute,
> God bless thee dearest son.[16]

Tennyson wrestles with the possibility that, because the child never breathed, maybe he never lived. The baby was 'not born' but at the same time did have a 'life', it is just that this life was 'ended ere thy breath begun'. Despite the close association between breath and life, Tennyson is aware that the boundaries of life and death are complex, and breath might not be a precise indicator for these.

Throughout life, breath is always occurring, naturally and usually imperceptibly, in the background. It is only brought to the foreground of one's awareness when something is wrong: in illness, in grief, in sobs, in polluted or

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[13] Mary W. Shelley, *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus*, ed. by M. K. Joseph (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 57.
[14] For a detailed examination of this event, and Tennyson's writing about it, see David B. Ruderman, 'The Breathing Space of Ballad: Tennyson's Stillborn Poetics', *Victorian Poetry [Tennyson at Two Hundred],* 47 (2009), 151-71.
[15] *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. by Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon, Jr., 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982-90), II, 15.
[16] Quoted in Ruderman, p. 152.

otherwise unhealthy air, during near-death experiences (such as choking or drowning), and during the final breaths of a life. Usually, breath is a cyclical, repetitive, continuous occurrence, happening without awareness and without thought. However, with each breath, the breathing person inevitably slips one breath closer to the (unknown) time of their death. Contemporary poetry was sensitive to this closeness of breath and death (partly because of, and emphasised by, the obvious rhyme), and although in the present study I focus on the way that advances in scientific understanding meant that this sense of dependency was modulated by a more interdependent, symbiotic understanding of breathing, it is nonetheless necessary to acknowledge this accepted literal and literary association.

In the following paragraph I offer a brief case study of Keats to tease out some of these more familiar poetic engagements with breath. Keats was intensely aware of his own breath, having watched both his mother and his brother die slow deaths from tuberculosis (as Daniel Karlin explains, Keats 'lived with the dread that he would die the same labouring death') and breath was at the centre of much of his poetry.[17] In 'Bright Star!' (1819), he expresses a wish to keep a moment in time the same and unchanging, yet simultaneously he acknowledges the impossibility of such stasis, and he does so through a focus on the breath:

> Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art –
> Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,
> And watching, with eternal lids apart,
> Like nature's patient, sleepless eremite,
> The moving waters at their priestlike task
> Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
> Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
> Of snow upon the mountains and the moors;
> No – yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
> Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,

[17] Daniel Karlin, *The Figure of the Singer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 68; tuberculosis is an infectious disease caused by mycobacterium tuberculosis, usually affecting the lungs. It is spread via the air (through breathing, coughing, speaking), and symptoms include coughing up blood, and chest pain.

To feel for ever its soft swell and fall,
    Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever – or else swoon to death.[18]

The 'Bright star' of the first line hangs in 'lone splendour', like a 'sleepless eremite': it is beautiful but, like a hermit, alone and apart. In opposition to this image of 'lone splendour' Keats expresses the wish to remain 'Pillow'd' on his 'fair love's ripening breast, | To feel for ever its soft swell and fall'.[19] This focus on the physicality of the breath, and the breast in which it resides, is consistent with other sonnets written (to Fanny Brawne) in 1819, but the sonnet is unique in the way that it attempts to concentrate on, and hold on to, a moment.[20] The wish to secure the ephemeral, to keep things as they are 'for ever' is immediately subverted by the 'soft swell and fall' of the 'ripening breast', and the recurrent sound of the beloved's 'tender-taken breath'. The living breath – that which makes the moment so 'sweet' – is a constant reminder of the impossibility of fixing time. The final words of the poem openly acknowledge this, with the alternative possibility of 'death'. The breath/death rhyme of the final couplet emphasises the impossibility of separating breath from death: from the moment that 'breath' ends the penultimate line, it seems inevitable that 'death' is going to close the sonnet, even if just for the necessity of the rhyme. The repetition of the word 'still' at the beginning of the penultimate line implies both continuation and stasis: the wish to keep hearing the lover's 'tender-taken breath' forever, yet also the desire to lie motionless so that the moment may never be lost. The wish is to retain complete this moment in all its life, in all its vitality – to capture it without damaging it – to live in

[18] *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. by Jack Stillinger (London: Heinemann, 1978), pp. 327-28.
[19] Susan Wolfson has called this image 'a problematic romance: a perpetual babyhood interchangeable with death' (Susan J. Wolfson, 'Late Lyrics: Form and Discontent', in *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. by Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 102-19 (p. 115)). By figuratively moving back in time as far as possible to babyhood, Keats might be positioning himself at the furthest living point from the death that would end this blissful moment.
[20] See: 'The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone!' (Keats, *Poems*, pp. 491-92); 'I cry your mercy – pity – love! – aye, love' (Keats, *Poems*, p. 492).

that moment without fading. However, each 'swell and fall' of the beloved's breast, each sound of her breath, is a reminder of time slipping away.

While this example is primarily a poetic engagement with the familiar sense of human dependency on the air for life, it also demonstrates that breathing together is its own form of communication. Communication on the breath would usually be that which is articulated as speech – and speech, as I show throughout this thesis, can be substantial, powerful, and enduring – but breath can also be heard, and felt, in the silences between words. In a journal entry in 1802, Dorothy Wordsworth describes an instance of this sort of communication, and communion:

> William lay, and I lay, in the trench under the fence – he with his eyes shut, and listening to the waterfalls and the birds. There was no one waterfall above another – it was a sound of waters in the air – the voice of the air. William heard me breathing and rustling now and then, but we both lay still, and unseen by one another; he thought that it would be as sweet thus to lie so in the grave, to hear the *peaceful* sounds of the earth and just to know that our dear friends were near.[21]

Dorothy focuses on the '*peaceful* sounds': 'the waterfalls and the birds', 'a sound of waters in the air – the voice of the air', and on her brother's awareness of her own 'breathing and rustling'. Both William and Dorothy, lying near each other but apart and 'unseen by one another', breathe a common air. Their awareness of one another is that of peaceful companionship, but they are also in communion with the wider world around them, the sound of Dorothy's (and, presumably, William's) breath mingling with the birds and 'the voice of the air'. Mary Jacobus writes of this passage that, 'Communication like this is pure aeration, the most basic interchange between self and self, self and other, inner and outer.'[22] In this context, the relationship between William

[21] *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1941), I, 139-40.
[22] Mary Jacobus, *Romantic Things: A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 114.

and Dorothy Wordsworth idealises a social aspect of common breathing and commonality.

Throughout this study I am attentive to ideas about shared breathing, and to the fact that in sharing breathing, one encounters the limits of communion and communication. Despite some intimations about the potential contiguity of 'the grave', the above passage does not suggest simply that we are dependent on breathing for life (cessation of breath equals death), but, rather, that we are fundamentally in an interdependent breathing relationship with the wider world. It was in the late eighteenth century that scientific (as well as cultural and literary) understanding really started to develop about a more expansive idea of symbiotic breathing. In this way, the cultural focus on breathing might even be thought of as democratising. However, I am also attentive to a developing recognition of the vulnerabilities that arise if one understands that social order depends on this sort of democratic understanding of breathing (a key focus of Chapter 5).

*

This thesis situates itself in relation to a developing focus on breath and air in academic studies. Two valuable general studies of the scientific and cultural history of air were published in 2010, shortly before I began this research: Steven Connor, in *The Matter of Air: Science and the Art of the Ethereal* offers a wide-ranging philosophical and scientific history of air over the last three centuries, and Vladimir Janković, in *Confronting the Climate: British Airs and the Making of Environmental Science*, considers the medical qualities and hazards of indoor and outdoor spaces in the eighteenth century, as concerns grew about the health of both external and internal

air.[23] Previous to these, Jan Golinski published significant studies in this field: in 1992 *Science as Public Culture: Chemistry and Enlightenment in Britain, 1760-1820* offered detailed chapters on (mainly pneumatic) chemistry during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, while in 2007, *British Weather and the Climate of Enlightenment* focused on the weather in general, but with a specific chapter on sensibility and aerial sensitivity.[24] Since I began work on this study, there has been an increased academic interest in the cultural and philosophical aspects of breath and air. The *Life of Breath* project, a five-year interdisciplinary research project exploring breathing and breathlessness, funded by the Wellcome Trust (with which I have been involved), was launched in 2015, and seeks to 'find new ways of answering questions about breathing and breathlessness and their relationship to both illness and wellbeing'.[25]

These studies of air and the climate to some extent arise out of a rich history of critical work on the literary relationship with science and medicine in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Notable work includes: Kathleen Coburn's essay, 'Coleridge: A Bridge between Science and Poetry' (1974); Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine's edited collection, *Romanticism and the Sciences* (1990); Hermione De Almeida's *Romantic Medicine and John Keats* (1991); Neil Vickers' *Coleridge and the Doctors: 1795-1806* (2004); Richard Holmes's popular, semi-biographical, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (2008); Sharon Ruston's *Creating Romanticism: Case Studies in the Literature, Science and Medicine of the 1790s* (2013); and Marilyn

[23] Steven Connor, *The Matter of Air: Science and the Art of the Ethereal* (London: Reaktion Press, 2010); Vladimir Janković, *Confronting the Climate: British Airs and the Making of Environmental Science* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
[24] Jan Golinski, *Science as Public Culture: Chemistry and Enlightenment in Britain, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and *British Weather and the Climate of Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
[25] *Life of Breath* <www.lifeofbreath.org> [accessed 20 September 2018].

Gaull's essay, 'Wordsworth and Science' (2015).[26] This emphasis on the importance of Romantic science has begun to extend to breathing, and, specifically, to poetic engagement with scientific understandings about breath and breathing. Critical studies include: Francis O'Gorman's essay on 'Coleridge, Keats, and the Science of Breathing' (2011); Sharon Ruston's short piece in *The Lancet*, 'The art of medicine: When respiring gas inspired poetry' (2013); Gabriel Cervantes and Dahlia Porter on 'Extreme Empiricism: John Howard, Poetry, and the Thermometrics of Reform' (2016); and Tim Fulford's recent essay on 'Science and Poetry in 1790s Somerset: the Self-Experiment Narrative, the Aeriform Effusion and the Greater Romantic Lyric' (2018).[27] There have not, however, yet been any longer studies that engage specifically with the relationship between Romantic and post-Romantic poetry, and contemporary scientific and cultural developments in relation to breathing.

This thesis builds on the above bodies of work and makes an original contribution to the field in the following ways. First, I demonstrate that inspiration is not merely a metaphor or trope in this period, but is vitally informed by recent developments in the science of breath and air. Nature poetry, therefore, is not just an extension of the pastoral, but is necessarily engaged with locating better health,

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[26] Kathleen Coburn, 'Coleridge: A Bridge between Science and Poetry', in *Coleridge's Variety: Bicentenary Studies*, ed. by John Beer (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 81-100; Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine, eds., *Romanticism and the Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Hermione De Almeida, *Romantic Medicine and John Keats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Neil Vickers, *Coleridge and the Doctors: 1795-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Richard Holmes, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (London: Harper Press, 2008); Sharon Ruston, *Creating Romanticism: Case Studies in the Literature, Science and Medicine of the 1790s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Marilyn Gaull, 'Wordsworth and Science', in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 599-613.

[27] Francis O'Gorman, 'Coleridge, Keats, and the Science of Breathing', *Essays in Criticism*, 61 (2011), 365-81; Sharon Ruston, 'The art of medicine: When respiring gas inspired poetry', *The Lancet*, 381 (2013), 366-67; Gabriel Cervantes and Dahlia Porter, 'Extreme Empiricism: John Howard, Poetry, and the Thermometrics of Reform', *The Eighteenth Century*, 57 (2016), 95-119; Tim Fulford, 'Science and Poetry in 1790s Somerset: the Self-Experiment Narrative, the Aeriform Effusion and the Greater Romantic Lyric', *English Literary History*, 85 (2018), 85-117 (Fulford's article addresses some similar themes to those that I cover in the earlier sections of Chapter 2 of this thesis, which developed from a paper I presented at the Wordsworth Summer Conference in 2016. Unfortunately, Fulford's article arrived too late to have any bearing on my research for that chapter).

inspiration, and revivification. Second, I argue that, because of this, breathing epitomised the corresponding qualities of one's symbiotic, reciprocal relationship with the world (which includes other breathing – and, to some extent, non-breathing – beings). And third, I show that Coleridge, Tennyson, and their contemporaries do not simply write about the idea of the transformative power of the environment or atmosphere, but they work with – and create – demonstrations of that physical power. The discovery that both the body and the mind are shaped by what is inhaled, and the way in which inhalation happens, fundamentally underpins this transformation. My methodological approach is primarily formalist, but set against, and informed by, the scientific and medical contexts that I introduce in Chapter 1.

I make no claim to cover everything that there is to say about breath in this period, and I am aware of all doors that I have had to close, and pathways that have yet to be explored, in relation to this work. There are other significant routes that this study might have taken, such as an examination of the dramatic monologue as it emerged in the nineteenth century (a form associated at its height – in the work of Robert Browning – with acts of revivification), a focus on contemporary ideas about the regulation of the breath (for example in Tractarian poetics), and work on ekphrastic engagements with breath (in, for example, Keats). Just as I do not claim to cover everything that there is to say about breath (and related topics) in this period, so Coleridge and Tennyson are not necessarily the only available examples for the specific focus that I have taken. Other poets in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also engaged with ideas of shared, common breathing and the substantiality of breath.

Coleridge and Tennyson function in this thesis, in part, as representative figures of their respective periods: Coleridge epitomises the emergence of these considerations of symbiotic breathing, and Tennyson exemplifies the consequences. This is the

primary reason that I concentrate on Coleridge and Tennyson. There are two other secondary, but distinct, reasons. First, there are some notable similarities between them in the ways that they engage with breath; both poets are interested in the breath not only in a general sense, but also in terms of their own physical breath and lungs. They are both remembered as great performers, who would talk, or recite poetry aloud, at length. One of the inquiries running through this thesis is to do with the substantiality of speech, and an anxiety about what happens when that speech, inevitably and finally, stops. Furthermore, both poets are intensely interested in contemporary scientific advances and I argue that they use ideas of breath and breathing in a way that is informed by such developments. Coleridge especially was personally involved with experiments and developing knowledge in the sciences, as I show in Chapters 1 and 2. Second, there is a clear line of influence running from Coleridge to Tennyson, via Arthur Hallam, which I trace from Chapter 3 onwards in terms of some of Tennyson's allusions to Coleridge's poetry, and also in the way that Coleridge (re)appears in some of Tennyson's major works, transformed and reimagined through Hallam. Throughout this study my focus is on the work of these two authors, but they are part of a wider context and cast of literary and scientific characters.

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The purpose of Chapter 1 is to establish a scientific and cultural context for the chapters that follow, and thereby to introduce in more detail the prevalent themes of this study. These overarching themes include the relationship between breath and thought, the symbiotic breathing relationship of the natural world (of which humans – and poets – are a part), technological and medical advances, giving or taking voice, and the contrasting qualities of substantiality and insubstantiality of breath. I briefly review the scientific history of breath and air in the preceding centuries, before offering a detailed

examination of the various ways that breath was engaged with, understood, and experimented upon during the lives of Coleridge and Tennyson. I begin by looking at Joseph Priestley and his work on oxygen and the vital principle of life, especially in terms of his discoveries about the reciprocal respiratory relationship between humans (and animals more broadly) and plants. I then move on to the way that these experiments within the laboratory began to be applied to the health of the breathing public, particularly in terms of fresh air, ventilation of public and domestic spaces, and the use of green plants to purify unhealthy air. In the next section I turn to Humphry Davy's experiments with nitrous oxide at the Pneumatic Institution, and the developing understanding that breathed 'airs' might affect the breather's thoughts and experience. In the section that follows I examine how this was taken to extremes, as inmates of mental asylums experienced delusions involving air affecting their thoughts. Taken in a high enough dosage, nitrous oxide could act as an anaesthetic, and in the next section I describe how and why this remained only a possibility in medical practice well into the nineteenth century, despite the fact that Davy was already aware of its effects in 1799. While there was little focus on putting people into a state of suspended animation, there was work and support going into the possibilities of removing them from such a state, through the application of breath, and I go on to outline the promotion of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation by the Royal Humane Society. There follows a section on ventriloquism, a craft which seeks to appear to give life to something else via the use of the breath, and which developed into entertainment in the late eighteenth century. Moving further into the nineteenth century, I show how understanding grew about the fact that dust in the air is made up of particles of living and dead people (among other things), which is then constantly breathed in by the living, and I proceed to describe how this realisation formed part of the cremation debate of the later nineteenth century.

This section, on cremation, recalls discoveries made by Priestley about the symbiotic respiratory relationship between plant and animal (and therefore human) life. Finally, there is a section on air-related technological inventions and advances in the period.

Chapter 2 is concerned with cycles, meeting points and exchanges of breath in Coleridge's writing, and focuses primarily on a selection of his earlier conversation poems, his response to Wordsworth's 1805 *Prelude* in 'To William Wordsworth,' and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Coleridge, I argue, writes about breathing as an interaction, a reciprocal engagement, between the self and the environment, and between the self and others. His scientific, political and personal understanding of different 'airs' plays into his poetry, and I examine how he explores the ways that different 'airs' might affect thought and feeling when they are breathed into the body. I begin by examining the connection between breath and thought in some of his early poetry ('The Nightingale', 'The Eolian Harp', 'Frost at Midnight'), in relation to the contexts of breathing and thought that I established in the previous chapter. I then turn to focus on Coleridge's engagement with the effect of rural, oxygenated air on the breathing subject in these poems, in comparison with air in confined spaces (such as the city and indoor space more generally). I link this to contemporary political thought about 'common air', and then move towards a reading of a passage from *The Statesman's Manual*, which is replete with images of renewal and respiration, stemming (I argue) from Coleridge's fascination with the latest scientific discoveries about breathing. The section on 'To William Wordsworth' considers the reciprocal breathing relationship (and passing of inspiration) between Coleridge and Wordsworth, through a detailed examination of Coleridge's poetic response to Wordsworth's performance of the *Prelude* at Coleorton. Through a focus on the breath, this reading seeks to draw out the complexities of voice and performance, inspiration, and poetic

rivalry and relationship in ‘To William Wordsworth’. Finally, the section on the *Ancient Mariner* offers a detailed examination of the ubiquitous breaths and breezes in a poem in which the central narrative is told entirely on the breath, delivered out loud to the unfortunate wedding guest. In particular, I analyse the interaction between the inner and outer ‘breaths’ in the poem, the interplay between the self and the surrounding environment, and the targeted way that the wind ‘breathes’ at key moments.

Chapter 3 is an examination of Coleridge the talker, and the chapter attempts to provide an answer for why Coleridge talked so much and so continuously. Described as the ‘greatest talker of his age’, and often the source of comic anecdotes because of his monologues, Coleridge seemed, in Hazlitt’s words, to ‘talk on for ever’.[28] Coleridge baffled and inspired, frustrated and enchanted his listeners. He himself attempted to defend, explain or discuss his constant talk on multiple occasions. In this chapter, I argue that Coleridge spoke so much for reasons of personal and interpersonal continuity; talking continuously proved that he was not alone, not insubstantial, not stopping. I suggest that there was a physiological root to this, which I trace through Coleridge’s own writings and in the findings during his autopsy, and I argue that this may have exacerbated a psychological fear of being stifled (something that appears repeatedly in the notebooks and letters). Coleridge’s response to the death of his eight-month old son, Berkeley, in 1799, profoundly affected him, but is rarely addressed by critics, and then only briefly; I examine contemporary notebooks and letters in which Coleridge reveals how this event caused him to question the substantiality of the self and his ability to express his emotions verbally. I then trace how these anxieties made their way into some of his subsequent poetry (including *Christabel*, ‘The Day Dream’, ‘Human Life: On the Denial of Immortality’, and ‘A Letter to ----’). Drawing on

[28] *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt,* ed. by Duncan Wu, 2 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), II, 320.

Frederic Bogel's contextual reading of R. D. Laing's theory of 'ontological insecurity' I explore Coleridge's anxieties about insubstantiality, and suggest that this fear was exacerbated at moments of particular emotional distress and contributed to a drive to 'breathe' himself into being as he attempted to prove that he was not unsubstantiated by his failing body.[29] I posit that this was an ingrained habit of self-realisation that not only explains the constant talking but also connects to other aspects of his life and work, specifically his performativity and his interest in discipleship, all of which contributed to the nineteenth century's inability to write an anecdotal biography of him. I end this chapter with an examination of Arthur Henry Hallam's response to Coleridge's talk in his poem, *Timbuctoo*, and gesture towards the ways that some of Hallam's lines about Coleridge reappear in *In Memoriam*, and even *Idylls of the King*, transformed but nonetheless recognisable.

In Chapter 4, I offer a detailed reading of the reciprocal breathing relationship in *In Memoriam*. Tennyson, I argue, uses the poem to breathe life into Hallam, paradoxically to attempt to bring him back to life but also to move him onwards to the next life. As well as breathing him onwards to immortality in death, the poet also attempts to secure Hallam immortality in poetry by breathing life into his memory. I begin by examining different aspects or versions of resuscitation, as discussed in Chapter 1 (including the 'kiss of life' and a focus on the drowned body), to demonstrate the ways that Tennyson attempts, through the poem, to revive the dead subject of his elegy. I discuss Tennyson's own physical breath (his lung-power), his engagement with other literature (in particular, Milton's *Lycidas*), and the metaphor of breathing the ship bearing Hallam's body onwards across the sea. I proceed to show that, at the same time that Tennyson attempts to breathe into Hallam to resuscitate him, Hallam is 'breathing

[29] Quoted in Frederic V. Bogel, *Literature and Insubstantiality in Later Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 25.

thro' [Tennyson's] lips' too; his voice is heard in imagination and quotation, and at times it is his words that re-inspire Tennyson to continue this work of bringing him back to life (*IM*, XVIII. 15). I show that Tennyson wrestles with the temptation to become a ventriloquist for the dead Hallam: he wishes to allow him to speak, but he is also uneasy about the propriety of speaking for the dead, and I turn to Jacques Derrida's *The Work of Mourning* to examine this anxiety in more detail. Finally, I analyse the way that Tennyson responds to passages from the *Ancient Mariner*, engaging with and building on the Romantic trope of the 'correspondent breeze' to assist him in his resuscitation of Hallam. Throughout the chapter, I argue that Tennyson's particular engagement with forms of resuscitation and ventriloquism reflect and emphasise the paradox of circular and forward movement inherent in mourning and elegy.

The final chapter of this study is concerned with the paradoxical nature of the spoken word in *Idylls of the King*: both shifting insubstantiality and substantial power. In the final idyll, Bedivere worries that 'empty breath | And rumours of a doubt' will affect how Arthur may be remembered in the future if there is nothing to show for his reign except for spoken stories, and I show how apposite this anxiety is, coming as it does near the end of a lengthy work in which speech is often unstable and untrustworthy, but at the same time has alarming consequences ('The Passing of Arthur', 267-68). Gossip, both powerful and unreliable, is introduced early on, and I trace its development from the rumours of Arthur's coming, through the escalating story of Lancelot and Guinevere (exacerbated by the slander of Vivien), and the growing realisation that Camelot is finally pulled apart by the consequences of these various destructive kinds of talk. Insubstantial breath in the form of gossip or spoken stories is continually set against the need for more concrete, physical evidence, and I show that Tennyson explicitly turns to the breath as a way to describe rumour and

gossip in *Idylls* (rather than using it simply as a metaphor for speech), which I read as part of a cultural framework of thinking about insubstantiality and proof. Running alongside these shifting forms of breath is Arthur's own problematic speech, and the 'strait vows' that the knights must make to create the Round Table in the first place ('The Coming of Arthur', 261).

The act of breathing maintains an invisible link between a person and their surrounding atmosphere, and I demonstrate that, as the destruction of the world of Camelot by the spoken word is realised in the final few idylls, so the atmosphere itself starts to solidify, and Tennyson focuses increasingly on the way that the remaining characters experience breathing. I offer a reading of Arthur's dying breaths (which seem to affect the rhythms of the text itself) as a version of Cheyne-Stokes breathing, which had recently been described as a medical phenomenon, and I end by examining the concept of commemoration in 'The Passing of Arthur' in the light of how speech has been presented throughout *Idylls*: mutable, powerful, elusive and lasting. I situate Bedivere's concern about proof, commemoration and storytelling within the context of the nineteenth century. Central to this, I argue, is the burgeoning scientific understanding of time and history, and a growing reliance on physical proofs (such as rocks and fossils) to explain the past, as understanding turns away from a world where words are to be unequivocally trusted on their own terms.

Throughout this study I focus on the way that breathing can be thought of as a reciprocal, communal activity. As the external interacts with the internal, and vice versa, so people are engaged in a symbiotic breathing relationship with the world around them. Breathing therefore affects thoughts, health, and poetic capacity. The scientific and cultural backgrounds that I offer in Chapter 1 form a foundation for my literary readings in the later chapters. While I focus on Coleridge and Tennyson, the

research also has further implications for the way that literature itself can be thought about throughout the period and into the twentieth century. Ultimately, my contention is that literary attentions to breath, in this period, are engaged with, and influenced by, the wealth of scientific development and concomitant cultural awareness, meaning that breathing is, in the work of Coleridge and Tennyson, compound, substantiated, and symbiotic.

CHAPTER 1

‘Different kinds of air’: a scientific, literary, and cultural history of breath

When Joseph Priestley named his new publication *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air* in 1774, he was announcing that air was no longer just one thing, but multiple, multiform and ubiquitous.[1] In the following pages I briefly outline the scientific legacy that Priestley inherits regarding breath and air, before going on to examine, in depth, experiments and discoveries about breath and air that occurred in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and which have a bearing on my readings of Coleridge and Tennyson. I examine the scientific discoveries themselves, but also the cultural effects of those discoveries: how they affected people outside the confines of the laboratory. I also show that concerns about breath and air pervade the literary culture of the period. Breath was, so to speak, in the air.

Before Priestley

People have long tried to understand the subtleties that keep us alive and healthy, and have been especially fascinated by the invisible and insubstantial air that we breathe. Early philosophers in China, India and Egypt all engaged with this issue, but it was the Greeks who ‘made the first attempt at explaining anatomical and physiological observations as details of a naturally occurring pattern, logically connected and

[1] I focus on Priestley primarily in relation to air, but his links to the Romantic poets are multiple in other ways too. He was politically active, he influenced Coleridge in his theological and political thought, and he was also a prominent member of the Lunar Society, which included individuals such as Erasmus Darwin, Josiah Wedgwood and James Watt (for more on the Lunar Society, and on Priestley’s political affiliations, see: Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men: Five Friends Whose Curiosity Changed the World* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), and Mark Philp, ‘Rational Religion and Political Radicalism’, *Enlightenment and Dissent,* 4 (1985), 35-46).

governed by natural laws.'[2] Anaximenes stated that πνευμα (*pneuma,* meaning both breath and spirit) was essential for life, arguing that, 'as our soul, being air, sustains us, so pnuema and air pervade the whole world.'[3] Aristotle, in his essay 'On Youth, Old Age, Life and Death, and Respiration', which he described as a 'discussion of life and death and kindred topic', explored the relationship between breath and life as he observed it.[4] During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was a particular revival of interest in air and breath, and a flood of experiments into the nature of air, with 'the principle fact of interest to researchers' being 'that air had weight and elasticity.'[5] Galileo Galilei ran experiments to measure how much air itself weighed, while Evangelista Torricelli and Otto von Guericke came to the realisation that atmospheric air could be described as a sort of ocean of air pressing down upon us. It was von Guericke who created the air pump in 1650, which would go on to be used for many other experiments.[6]

One of the people to be particularly influenced by Galileo's work was Robert Boyle, who visited Florence in 1641. During the 1660s and 1670s, Boyle ran experiments into the nature of breath and air: over the course of numerous experiments he put creatures such as 'ducks, ducklings, kittens, larks, greenfinches, flies, bees, ants, beetles, mites, and tadpoles' into an air pump, from which he then slowly withdrew the air.[7] Finding that they died when deprived of air, he realised that he had found a link between air and life. He therefore 'diverted his attention to trying to understand

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[2] Poul Astrup and John W. Severinghaus, *The History of Blood Gases, Acids and Bases* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1986), p. 1.
[3] Quoted in John B. West, *Essays on the History of Respiratory Physiology* (New York: Springer, 2015), p. 4.
[4] *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), I, 763.
[5] Connor, *The Matter of Air,* p. 15.
[6] He 'began to ponder ways and means of making wooden barrels airtight, and in the process invented the air pump by the aid of which he discovered the enormous forces that air pressure was capable of exerting' (Astrup and Severinghaus, p. 11).
[7] Astrup and Severinghaus, p. 23; Joseph Wright's *An Experiment on a Bird in an Air Pump* (1768) depicts a recreation of one of Boyle's experiments.

breathing. What made air so vital?'[8] Boyle's assistant, Robert Hooke, who went on to become the Curator of Experiments to the Royal Society in 1664, extended Boyle's experiments by also using larger animals. A notable example of his further experimentation was in 1664, when he strapped a stray dog down on his dissection table, and kept it alive by artificial respiration using bellows and 'a certain pipe thrust into the wind-pipe of the dog': 'the heart continued beating for a very long time after all the thorax and belly had been opened; nay, after the diaphragm had been in great part cut away'.[9] In this way he demonstrated that even with its thorax opened the dog could be kept alive, provided that air was continually pumped into its lungs. However, Hooke was so affected by the dog staring silently up at him during this experiment, that he was put off doing more, writing to Boyle on 10 November 1664 that, 'I shall hardly be induced to make any further trials of this kind, because of the torture of this creature.'[10]

Jonathan Swift satirises such experiments, and probably Hooke specifically, as part of the 'grand Academy of Lagado' in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). During his tour of the Academy, Gulliver is taken to see the work of a 'great Physician' who is famous for curing 'the Cholick […] by contrary Operations from the same Instrument':

> He had a large pair of bellows with a long slender Muzzle of Ivory. This he conveyed eight inches up the Anus, and drawing in the Wind, he affirmed he could make the Guts as lank as a dried Bladder. But when the Disease was more stubborn and violent, he let in the Muzzle while the Bellows were full of Wind, which he discharged into the Body of the Patient, then withdrew the Instrument to replenish it, clapping his thumb strongly against the Orifice of the Fundament; and this being repeated three or four times, the adventitious Wind would rush out, bringing the noxious along with it (like Water put into a Pump) and the Patient [would] recover. I saw him try both Experiments upon a Dog, but could not discern any Effect from the former. After the latter, the

[8] Gabrielle Walker, *An Ocean of Air: A Natural History of the Atmosphere* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 31; Boyle also found that flames died without air.
[9] Quoted in Thomas Birch, *The History of the Royal Society of London for Improving the Natural Knowledge, From its First Rise* (London: A. Millar, 1756), p. 486; for further information see Astrup and Severinghaus, pp. 24-25.
[10] *The Correspondence of Robert Boyle*, ed. by M. Hunter, A. Clericuzio and L. M. Principe, 6 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001), II, 339.

> Animal was ready to burst, and made so violent a Discharge, as was very offensive to me and my Companions. The Dog died on the Spot.[11]

Both the presence of the dog, and the focus on air and the use of bellows, recreate aspects of Hooke's experiments over sixty years earlier, but ludicrously transformed. Swift's fictional experiments are no longer about respiration, or about investigating the vitality of air, but about flatulence. This fascination with scatological and other noxious forms of air features repeatedly in satirical literary and cultural engagements with gases, as I will demonstrate during this chapter.

Oxygen

Experiments on the relationship of breath and air gained momentum in the last three decades of the eighteenth century. When Priestley named his new publication *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air*, he was tapping into a culture that had begun to think about 'airs' as multiple.[12] As Gabrielle Walker writes,

> nearly one hundred years after the death of Robert Boyle, the science of gases, or 'airs' as they were then known, had begun to flourish. As well as ordinary 'common air' – the stuff that surrounds us and that we breathe – it seemed that there were several other 'airs'.[13]

Priestley was aware that even giving a name to all these new discoveries was difficult, stating that, 'in writing upon the subject of *different kinds of air*, I find myself at a loss for proper *terms*, by which to distinguish them.'[14] There are four main discoveries that

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[11] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. by Albert J. Rivero (London: Norton, 2002), pp. 151; 153-54.
[12] The discovery and understanding of oxygen in the eighteenth century was a long and complicated process, and who exactly should be credited with the discovery is still disputed. Carl Wilhelm Scheele, Antoine Lavoisier and Priestley were all working around the same time, and made different versions of this discovery independently. It was Lavoisier who first used the term 'oxygène' (Priestley had called it 'dephlogisticated air,' still believing in the phlogiston theory. See John Henry White, *The History of the Phlogiston Theory* (New York: AMS Press, 1973)); 'oxygen' is etymologically derived from the Greek *ὀξυ-*, meaning 'pungent' or 'acid' (oxygen was originally supposed to be an essential component of acids) with the suffix *γεν-* (root of *γίγνεσθαι* meaning 'to be born'), used in the sense 'that which produces': 'oxygen', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 10 December 2016].
[13] Walker, p. 38.
[14] Priestley, *Experiments and Observations*, p. 23.

emerge from Priestley's experiments: the discovery, or synthesis, of different gases; animal respiration; plant respiration; and, stemming from these and most important to my thesis, the symbiotic respiratory relationship between animal life and plant life. I focus on Priestley in this section partly because I am less interested in the actual discovery of oxygen than in what it meant in terms of new understandings about respiration, and partly also because it is Priestley who directly influences Coleridge, as well as Wordsworth.

Priestley spent the early 1770s observing and experimenting with the air that we breathe, and testing whether certain of its properties were better for breathing than others. Priestley's experiments involved isolating 'airs' in an inverted container and seeing, for instance, whether small animals could live in the isolated gas or whether a flame would burn, and for how long:

> If I want to see whether an animal will live in any kind of air, I first put the animal into a small vessel, just large enough to give it room to stretch itself; and as I generally make use of mice for this purpose, I have found it very convenient to use the hollow part of a tall beerglass [….] In this vessel a mouse will live for twenty minutes, or half an hour.[15]

He then made various changes to the environment to see what difference this would make. Having carried out experiments on mice with pure oxygen in a bell jar, and seeing that they lived longer in it than in atmospheric air, Priestley also began experimenting on himself. Breathing pure oxygen, he noticed that he felt 'particularly light and easy for some time afterwards,' and envisaged that, 'in time, this pure air may become a fashionable article in luxury. Hitherto only two mice and myself have had the privilege of breathing it.'[16]

A notable discovery deriving from Priestley's experiments was the effect that green plants had on air that had previously been rendered toxic by an animal breathing

[15] Quoted in Astrup and Severinghaus, p. 39.
[16] Priestley, *Experiments and Observations,* p. 102; this foreshadows oxygen therapies, which become popular in the twentieth century.

in it. Priestley found that air in a bell jar – after a mouse could no longer live in it, or a flame burn – would become perfectly healthy again if green plants were put into the vessel. On 23 August 1771 he wrote to his friend, Theophilus Lindsay:

> I have of late been very busy about some experiments on air, with respect to respiration and vegetation, and flatter myself that I have discovered what I have long been in quest of, viz., that process in nature by which air, rendered noxious by breathing, is returned to its former salubrious condition. Air in which animals have died, and which kills other animals, instantaneously, afterwards is made fit for respiration again by plants living in it, and they thrive amazingly in that noxious air.[17]

This was a momentous advance in understanding concerning the equilibrium of the world; what humans and animals make noxious, plant life renews. In simplified (modern) terms, animal and plant respiration is in a symbiotic relationship in which plants take in carbon dioxide and throw away oxygen as a waste product, while animals take in oxygen and expel carbon dioxide.[18] Priestley publicly related these findings, initially at the Royal Society in London, and then in a paper published in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society as 'Observations on Different Kinds of Air', for which he won the Royal Society's Copley Medal in 1772.[19] These 'observations' were then expanded to book length in *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air* in 1774*:*

> This observation [that plants thrive in air which has been rendered unfit for animal life by animal respiration or putrefaction] led me to conclude, that plants, instead of affecting the air in the same manner with animal respiration, reverse the effects of breathing, and tend to keep the atmosphere sweet and wholesome, when it becomes noxious, in consequence of animals either living and breathing, or dying and putrefying in it.

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[17] *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, ed. John Towill Rutt, 25 vols (London: George Smallfield), I, 146-47.

[18] In fact, neither air sample will be composed exclusively of the pure gas – both will be mixtures of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and other gases – but the relative proportions will be different. Atmospheric air is actually largely nitrogen, and carbon dioxide is only really present in trace amounts, but the variations in this are significant.

[19] Joseph Priestley, 'Observations on Different Kinds of Air', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 62 (1772), 147-264.

> In order to ascertain this, I took a quantity of air, made thoroughly noxious, by mice breathing and dying in it, and divided it into two parts; one of which I put into a phial immersed in water; and to the other [which was contained in a glass jar, standing in water] I put a sprig of mint. This was about the beginning of August 1771, and after eight or nine days, I found that a mouse lived perfectly well in that part of the air, in which the sprig of mint had grown, but died the moment it was put into the other part of the same original quantity of air; and which I had kept in the very same exposure, but without any plant growing in it.

Priestley realised that 'plants are capable of perfectly restoring the air injured by respiration', and was able to conclude that this reciprocal plant and animal breathing would also occur on a much larger scale than his own experiments:

> These proofs of a partial restoration of air by plants in a state of vegetation, though in a confined and unnatural situation, cannot but render it highly probable, that the injury which is constantly done to the atmosphere by the respiration of such a number of animals, and the putrefaction of such masses of both vegetable and animal matter, is, in part at least, repaired by the vegetable creation. And, notwithstanding the prodigious mass of air that is corrupted daily by the above-mentioned causes; yet, if we consider the immense profusion of vegetables upon the face of the earth, growing in places suited to their nature, and consequently at full liberty to exert all their powers, both inhaling and exhaling, it can hardly be thought, but that it may be a sufficient counterbalance to it, and that the remedy is adequate to the evil.[20]

He inferred from his discovery that the plant and animal kingdoms were essentially breathing in harmony with each other across the world.

It seems that Priestley did not fully understand the importance of light in the process of turning noxious, rebreathed air (carbon dioxide) into healthy air (oxygen). Reading his accounts of his experiments, it is evident that some of them were more effective in the summer, but he did not entirely grasp the importance of this fact. He records in *Experiments and Observations* that,

> towards the end of the year some experiments of this kind [adding green plants to a bell jar in which the air had been made noxious by the breathing and dying of small animals] did not answer so well as they had done before, and I had instances of the relapsing of this restored air to its former noxious state. I therefore suspended my judgement concerning the efficacy of plants to restore this kind of noxious air, till I should have an opportunity of repeating my

[20] Priestley, *Experiments and Observations*, pp. 87; 92; 93-94.

> experiments, and giving more attention to them. Accordingly I resumed the experiments in the summer of the year 1772, when I presently had the most indisputable proof of the restoration of putrid air by vegetation.[21]

He had noticed that the experiments were not working as well in the winter, but did not make the connection with the time of year (and therefore the amount of light that was present). Priestley may not have quite realised the role that sunlight played in ensuring the 'restoration of the air' by plants, but this was observed soon after by Jan Ingenhousz, who had met Priestley in 1771.[22] Ingenhousz was particularly conscious of this influence, and referred explicitly to 'that excellent philosopher and inventive genius, the reverend Dr. Priestley' and his 'important discovery' when, later, he wrote about his own discoveries in the aptly-named *Experiments upon Vegetables, Discovering Their great Power of purifying the Common Air in the Sun-shine, and of Injuring it in the Shade and at Night* (1779). Ingenhousz noticed that green plants submerged in water give out bubbles in sunlight, which eventually stop in the shade, and he deduced from this a relationship between plants, sunlight, and oxygenation. The Preface to *Experiments upon Vegetables* begins:

> The common air, that element in which we live [….], the breath of life, deserves so much the more the attention and investigation of philosophers, as it is the only substance without which we can scarce subsist alive a single moment, and whose good or bad qualities have the greatest influence upon our constitution. The most active poisons which are known do not so quickly destroy the life of an animal as the want of air, or the breathing of it when it is rendered highly noxious. It will appear in this work, that those very plants, which, influenced by the light of the sun, repair the injury done to this fluid by the breathing of animals, and by many other causes may, in different circumstances, poison too much this very element, as to render it absolutely unfit for respiration, and, instead of keeping up life, to extinguish it in a moment.

In *Experiments upon Vegetables,* Ingenhousz records how he undertook his own experiments, and was excited to find that plants, '*not only have a faculty to correct bad*

[21] Priestley, *Experiments and Observations,* p. 88.
[22] Ingenhousz was best known during his lifetime for successfully inoculating the Austrian Royal Family against smallpox in 1768, and was also a Fellow of the Royal Society in London.

air in six or ten days, by growing in it, as the experiments of Dr. Priestley indicate, but that they perform this important office in a compleat manner in a few hours'; this was '*by no means owing to the vegetation of the plant, but to the influence of the light of the sun upon the plant*'.[23] This discovery was the next piece in the puzzle of what we now call photosynthesis, and would be applied to practical uses outside the laboratory, as I shall discuss in the following pages. As well as the importance of sunlight in this process, Ingenhousz was particularly interested in the reciprocal process of oxygenation, and pointed out that Priestley's discovery had shown 'even to a demonstration, that the vegetable kingdom is subservient to the animal; and, vice versâ, that the air, spoiled and rendered noxious to animals by their breathing in it, serves to plants as a kind of nourishment.'[24] It is this aspect that proved particularly important in literary responses.

This thesis began with a reading of the opening of the 1805 *Prelude* in relation to the cultural context of breath and breathing in which Wordsworth was writing. While Wordsworth was not explicitly writing about scientific developments, he was writing with an awareness of these new ways of thinking about the world, and also with an awareness of how science might be attended to in poetry. One reason for this latter awareness was the influence of Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* (1791), which was extremely popular when it was published, and was reissued repeatedly throughout the 1790s. Although 'The Loves of Plants' (in which Darwin illustrates Linnaeus's sexualised classification of plants) was the part most admired by the public, 'The Economy of Vegetation', which celebrates the advance of science and technology

[23] Jan Ingenhousz, *Experiments upon Vegetables, Discovering Their great Power of purifying the Common Air in the Sun-shine, and of Injuring it in the Shade and at Night* (London: P. Elmsly, 1779), pp. xv; xiii-xiv; xxxiii-xxxiv. Ingenhousz had examined and written about this aspect in more detail in 'An Essay on the Food of Plants and the Renovation of Soils', in *Outlines of the Fifteenth Chapter of the Proposed General Report from the Board of Agriculture: On the subject of Manures* (London: W. Bulmer and Co, 1776), appendix [n. p.].
[24] Ingenhousz, *Experiments upon Vegetables*, p. xxiii.

through consideration of each element in turn (Canto Four being concerned with air), was also widely read. As well as having a role in introducing scientific discovery to the wider population, Darwin also influenced other poets, including Wordsworth and Coleridge. Wordsworth had read Darwin's long poem in 1792; he called it 'dazzling' and, as Emile Legouis has suggested, 'was among those who, for some years, extolled *The Botanic Garden* to the skies.'[25] Duncan Wu has made a detailed examination of Darwin's impact on Wordsworth's poetry in *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799,* positing that Wordsworth 'reread Darwin shortly before, or during, composition of the *Two-Part Prelude*.'[26] Coleridge was similarly well-acquainted with *The Botanic Garden* and had met Darwin in 1796, although his reactions to the poem and its author were more varied, ranging from statements such as 'Dr Darwin possesses, perhaps, a greater range of knowledge than any other man in Europe' and 'on the whole, I think, he is the first *literary* character in Europe, and the most original-minded Man,' to 'I absolutely nauseate Darwin's poem.'[27] Ralph Coffman includes *The Botanic Garden* in his catalogue, *Coleridge's Library*, and Kathleen Coburn notes evidence of influence as well as a number of clear references to it in Coleridge's writing, especially in *Biographia Literaria*.[28]

Canto Four of 'The Economy of Vegetation' is specifically concerned with contemporary scientific and technological advances in relation to air, and Priestley plays a major role in this section. Take, for example, this short excerpt:

> SYLPHS! YOU, retiring to sequester'd bowers,
> Where oft your PRIESTLEY woos your airy powers,

[25] Both quoted in Desmond King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 68; 67.
[26] Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 45.
[27] Letter to Josiah Wade on 27 January 1796, in *CL*, I, 177; letter to John Thelwall on 6 February 1797, *CL*, I, 305; letter to Thelwall on 13 May 1796, *CL*, I, 216.
[28] Ralph J. Coffman, *Coleridge's Library: A Bibliography of Books Owned or Read by Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Boston: G. K. Hall & co., 1987), 62; *CN*, I, Notes, 9; for further treatments of Darwin's influence on both Wordsworth and Coleridge see King-Hele.

> On noiseless step or quivering pinion glide,
> As sits the Sage with Science by his side;
> To his charm'd eye in gay undress appear,
> Or pour your secrets on his raptured ear.
> How nitrous Gas from iron ingots driven
> Drinks with red lips the purest breath of heaven;
> How, while Conferva from its tender hair
> Gives in bright bubbles empyrean air;
> The crystal floods phlogistic ores calcine,
> And the pure ETHER marries with the MINE. (I. 4. 165-76)

Line 166 ('Where oft your PRIESTLEY') is footnoted:

> The fame of Dr. Priestley is known in every part of the earth where science has penetrated. His various discoveries respecting the analysis of the atmosphere, and the production of variety of new airs or gasses, can only be clearly understood by reading his Experiments on Airs [….]
>
> Concerning the green substance which grows at the bottom of reservoirs of water, which Dr. Priestley discovered to yield much pure air when the sun shone on it. His method of collecting this air is by placing over the green substance, which he believes to be a vegetable of the genus conferva, an inverted bell-glass previously filled with water, which subsides as the air arises; it has since been found that all vegetables give up pure air from their leaves, when the sun shines upon them, but not in the night, which may be owing to the sleep of the plant.[29]

There is some misunderstanding here (I have already noted that Priestley had not fully understood the nature of photosynthesis), but the detail is significant. Provided the reader of 'The Economy of Vegetation' also read the footnotes, they would be able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the latest scientific developments, particularly if they took into account the suggestions for further reading.

[29] Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden*, ed. by Adam Komisaruk and Allison Dushane, 2 vols (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), [n.p.]; This might not actually be as eccentric as it sounds – recent research in 2016 suggests that plants may in fact 'sleep' at night. See: Andy Coghlan, 'Trees seen resting branches while "asleep" for the first time', *New Scientist*, 18 May 2016 <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2088833-trees-seen-resting-branches-while-asleep-for-the-first-time/>, and Henry Bodkin, 'Do gardens sleep? Jellyfish may have the answer', *Telegraph*, 21 September 2017 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2017/09/21/do-gardens-sleep-jellyfish-may-have-answer/> [both accessed 10 October 2017].

Fresh air and health

Following experiments with air in the confines of the laboratory by Priestley and others, aspects of these discoveries began to gain influence and application in the wider world. New understandings about the health of air, and in particular the effects of different 'airs', began to be applied to the health of the breathing public. The last two decades of the eighteenth century were particularly concerned with the health of air, and this fascination lasted well into the nineteenth century. Miasmas, which had long been a source of concern, formed the backdrop to these new apprehensions. Popularly held until about 1880, when germ theory became widely accepted, miasma theory held that disease and infection were brought by noxious vapours and fogs; malaria, for example, literally means 'bad air'. Ubiquitous throughout Europe and the Americas, miasmas were thought to be both more elusive and more substantial than normal, atmospheric air. As Conevery Bolton Valencius writes, 'Miasmas behaved like smoke or mist, blown with air currents, wafted by winds, and rising from earth, vegetation, or water.' She continues:

> Common language, however, implied that miasma did not simply travel *on* air, it changed the nature of the air through which it propagated [….] Like a diseased person, atmosphere was infected by miasma. The air itself became sick. Not passively transported, but noxiously transforming, miasma charged the very atmosphere with sickness.[30]

Miasmas continued to be a concern throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth; however, anxieties about the salubrity of air became more specific as more was discovered about it. Rather than simply being uneasy about unhealthy air, the public started being offered solutions, and people began to have a say in the way they might manage their interaction with the air they were breathing.

[30] Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Land: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), pp. 115; 116.

During Priestley's experiments into the properties of different gases, he discovered that by mixing nitrous gas with a sample of another gas within a confined space, he was able to test the purity of the air by observing the decrease in volume within the space. Priestley used this test to do more detailed experiments with air collected from different kinds of places. For example, as Simon Schaffer describes, in 1779 he asked his friend the 'Birmingham manufacturer Mathew Boulton, for "air as it is actually breathed by the different manufacturers in this kingdom" to be gathered from different workshops in the Midlands. He also sampled the air left in rooms at Shelbourne's house after gatherings'.[31] These principles were developed by Marsilio Landriani in Italy, who in 1775 had invented the eudiometer, an instrument to determine the healthiness of the air, which he used in his own experiments.[32] The eudiometer is a glass tube, closed at one end, into which the gases are deposited and then observed, and is essentially used to measure the amount of oxygen in air.[33] Humphry Davy utilised a eudiometer during experiments to discover the salubrity of the air at Tintern Abbey in 1800, and also in his chemistry lectures in London in 1802, observed by Coleridge.[34] Schaffer points out that Landriani's invention was 'following Italian translations of the pneumatic experiments' of Priestley: 'Landriani transformed a test reported by Priestley into an instrument which would be accurate, portable and, he claimed, revolutionary.'[35] He published his experiments in a paper called *Ricerche fisiche intorno alla salubrità dell'aria* (Physical researches concerning the health of

[31] Simon Schaffer, 'Measuring Virtue: Eudiometry, Enlightenment and Pneumatic Medicine', in *The Medical Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Andrew Cunningham and Roger French, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 281-318 (pp. 290-91).
[32] Although Landirani is usually credited with the invention of the eudiometer, in reality this was a far more complicated process, involving rival inventions and disagreements over nomenclature. See Golinski, *Science as Public Culture*, p. 118.
[33] Landriani named it from the Greek εὔδιος, meaning clear, which derives from the prefix εὐ-, meaning good, and the stem διϝ, meaning 'of Zeus', the god of the sky or atmosphere – which is then mixed with the suffix –meter, meaning 'measure': 'eudiometer', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <www.oed.com> [accessed 14 December 2016].
[34] For more details on Davy's adventures with a eudiometer at Tintern Abbey, see Fulford, p. 106.
[35] Schaffer, p. 282.

air), and, with his colleague Pietro Moscati, tested the air in various public places in Milan during the spring of 1775. Landriani recorded that, 'the air of the pit at the Theatre during the last days of Carnival was found to be as infected as that of tombs.'[36]

The eudiometer was marketed to the general public in the 1770s and 1780s, and briefly became a commercial venture, but lost popularity towards the end of the century as people began to question how accurate and useful it actually was. However, as Golinski points out, 'the underlying assumptions of the eudiometrical program nonetheless persisted among those whom Priestley influenced. Kinds of air were to be arranged in a single scale of virtue, corresponding to their suitability for respiration and their general healthiness.'[37] Questions of the difference between gases became less important than the question of what was healthy for humans to breathe, and how to improve the air that was breathed in everyday life and environments.[38]

Although miasmas were an established and continuing source of concern in the late eighteenth century, these years also saw a growing focus on the problems associated with indoor air. Janković demonstrates a burgeoning anxiety at this time about the everyday sources of health problems – the air in the bedroom or the ballroom, rather than the air rising from graveyards and marshes – stating that, 'physicians moved hazards from outdoors to indoors and, in addition to miasmas, began to discern the less spectacular if more tangible aerial poisoning in the everyday spaces of leisure, work, and sleep'.[39]

Later eighteenth-century writings include a number of allusions to fresh air; the phenomenon was sufficiently widespread in 1771 for Tobias Smollett to have been able to use it for comic effect in his picaresque novel, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*.

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[36] Quoted in Schaffer, p. 295
[37] Golinski, *British Weather,* p. 163.
[38] We now have 'apps' for testing the health of air, as concerns about polluted city air increase in the twenty-first century.
[39] Janković, p. 67.

In a letter to his physician, Dr Lewis, we find Matthew Bramble relating his experience of a party at a ballroom in Bath. 'Half stifled, in the midst of a noisome crowd,' he begins to wonder how and why all these people crowd together in such a way that they cause him to endure 'a swimming of the head which was also affected by the foul air, circulating through such a number of rotten human bellows.' Overcome by a particularly strong waft of foul air ('an Egyptian gale, so impregnated with pestilential vapours'), as he relates, he collapses, and is then affronted by the doctor's suggestion that his fainting was 'entirely occasioned by an accidental impression of fetid effluvia upon nerves of uncommon sensibility'. His reply is a detailed evocation of the reasons one might avoid crowded indoor spaces in the late eighteenth century:

> I know not how other people's nerves are constructed; but one would imagine they must be made of very coarse materials, to stand the shock of such a torrid assault. It was, indeed, *a compound of villainous smells*, in which the most violent stinks, and the most powerful perfumes, contended for the mastery. Imagine to yourself a high exalted essence of mingled odours, arising from putrid gums, imposthumated lungs, sour flatulencies, rank arm-pits, sweating feet, running sores and issues, plasters, ointments, and embrocations, hungary water, spirit of lavender, assafœtida drops, musk, hartshorn, and sal volatile; besides a thousand frowzy steams, which I could not analyse. Such, O Dick! is the fragrant æther we breathe in the polite assemblies of Bath – Such is the atmosphere I have exchanged for the pure, elastic, animating air of the Welsh mountains.[40]

This is a fictional account of contemporary conditions that Bryan Cornwell, writing thirteen years later in *The Domestic Physician; or, Guardian of Health* (1784), would describe medically:

> when great numbers of people are crouded into one place, if air has not a free current, it soon becomes unwholesome. Hence delicate persons are apt to turn

[40] Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, ed. by O. M. Brack, Jr. (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 63-64; For further critical reading about sensibility, see G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986); Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: a Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); The quotation from Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 'compound of villainous smell', serves to underline the comic and absurd element of the situation (III. 5. 85, pp. 511-36).

> sick or faint in crouded churches, assembles, play-houses, or any place where the air is injured by breathings, fires, candles, &c.[41]

Matthew Bramble might well take issue with being called a 'delicate person', but his experience of, and response to, the un-salubriousness of rebreathed air in crowded indoor spaces was not unique.

At the same time, and linked to this, concerns grew about an increasing sense of general 'unwellness', demonstrating the place of breathing in the culture of sensibility. According to contemporary medical writers on the subject, modern, luxurious living was debilitating. People became weakened by various external stimuli such as 'fashionable clothing, indoor entertainment, and the consumption of tea and coffee,' which then made them more susceptible to the air itself.[42] In *Lectures on Diet and Regimen: Being a Systematic Inquiry into the Most Rational Means of Preserving Health and Prolonging Life* (first delivered in Bath and Bristol in early 1798), medical writer Anthony Willich comments on the 'more general malady of the times':

> *an extreme sensibility to every change of atmosphere; or rather, a constantly sensible relation to its influence*. We are not only more subject to be affected with every current of air, every change of heat and cold, but the feelings of some are so exquisitely delicate, that in a close apartment, nay in bed, they can determine with accuracy the state of the weather, as well as the direction of the wind.[43]

This concern about the effect of atmospheric conditions on already-sensitive people continued well into the nineteenth century. For example, Thomas Forster's *Observations on the Casual and Periodical Influence of Particular States of the Atmosphere on Human Health and Diseases, Particularly Insanity* (1817), begins with the statement that there 'are peculiar states of the atmosphere, independent of its

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[41] B. Cornwell, *The Domestic Physician; or, Guardian of Health* (London: J. Murray, J Bew, and L. Davis, 1784), pp. 65-6.
[42] Golinski, *British Weather,* p. 138; see also Barker-Benfield.
[43] A. F. M. Willich, *Lectures on Diet and Regimen: Being a Systematic Inquiry into the Most Rational Means of Preserving Health and Prolonging Life*, 2nd edn (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), pp. 57-58.

temperature, weight, or moisture, which have a particular influence on human health and disease, as well as on other natural phenomena.'[44] The general argument of his work is that many people are mentally and physically affected both by weather and by certain times of the month and year, especially if they are thought to be weak or already susceptible.

Particularly notable in this narrative are the many suggestions about how to deal with such problems. Medical literature 'gave considerable attention to the "election of air" as a preservative of respiratory, gastric, and nervous health' ('choosing the air' essentially meant visiting or moving to places with perceived 'better' air), but, clearly, this option was not available to the majority of sufferers who could not afford lengthy seaside holidays.[45] Thomas Beddoes's Pneumatic Institution (which I discuss in the next section) was initially established to attempt to alleviate diseases of the lungs by administrating medicinal 'airs' artificially, after Beddoes had observed the effect that a change in air could have on those who were unwell. However, an easier answer to the social problem of people spending too much time indoors breathing the same stuffy air was ventilation, or the purification of the air in rooms. There were various suggestions about how best to do this, and it became a widespread, commercial venture.[46] Janković points out that by the late eighteenth century, in domestic settings, 'ventilation could […] perform several functions: it enabled the house to breathe with its surroundings, sheltered privacy and family

[44] Thomas Forster, *Observations on the Casual and Periodical Influence of Particular States of the Atmosphere on Human Health and Diseases, Particularly Insanity* (London: T. and G. Underwood, 1817), p. ix.
[45] Janković, p. 121.
[46] See, for example, John Hill, *The Old Man's Guide to Health and Longer Life* (Dublin: James Hoey, 1760), p. 20, and Thomas Moffett, *Health's Improvement: or, Rules Comprizing and Discovering the Nature, Method and Manner of Preparing all Sorts of Foods Used in This Nation* (London: T. Osborne, 1746), p. 83; although not all medical writers and practitioners were in favour of promoting ventilation, it was overwhelmingly popular in general medical advice (Janković, pp. 69-71).

comfort, and served against the "fixed air" [carbon dioxide] buildup due to domestic fires and rebreathing.'[47]

This focus on better air was also part of John Howard's discussion of prison reform, as well as being relevant to arguments about reforming other kinds of public dwelling buildings. Howard's *The State of Prisons in England and Wales, with Preliminary Observations, and an Account of Some Foreign Prisons* (1777), based on his own inspections of prisons throughout his life, recommends the 'free admission' of fresh air, and Cervantes and Porter point out that, 'his proposed improvements center on constructing and managing prisons so as to ensure adequate air circulation.' In fact, they explain (quoting Howard), 'Howard complains that in jails "methods are contrived to rob prisoners" of air, a necessary article of life "given us by Providence quite *gratis*, without any care or labor of our own"'. Howard's urgent calls for reform influenced 'a sustained cultural engagement with prison reform' by poets in his own lifetime (including William Hayley, William Cowper and Samuel Jackson Pratt), and 'one can trace the familiar tropes of Romantic-era prison literature' by poets including Wordsworth and Coleridge to Howard and the poets that he influenced directly.[48] In a similar vein, John Aikin, in his *Thoughts on Hospitals* (1771), argues that to create the most salubrious hospital buildings it is important to 'leave as much vacant space, occupied by the fresh air alone circulating freely, as was in any degree compatible with use and convenience'.[49]

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[47] Janković, pp. 70-71; for contemporary thoughts about the importance of ventilation as a possible way of reducing disease, see: J. Pringle, *Observations on the Diseases of the Army in Camp and Garrison* (London: A. Millar, D. Wilson and T. Payne, 1752); John Haysham, *An Account of Jail Fever or Typhus Carcerum as It Appeared at Carlisle in the Year 1781* (London: T. Cadell and others, 1782); John Haygarth, *A Letter to Dr. Percival, on the Prevention of Infectious Fevers* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1801).
[48] Cervantes and Porter, pp. 100; 104-5; 97-98.
[49] Quoted in Cervantes and Porter, p. 111.

The way that dwelling spaces were built became important, and copious improvements could be made to housing (as well as to prisons and hospitals) which would help to improve the air.[50] Willich, in a section of *Lectures on Diet and Regimen* called 'Of the Improvement of Air in Dwelling-houses', states that 'the sitting-room ought, if possible, to be above the ground floor, or in the second story' and 'it should be so constructed as to admit a free current of air; but if this cannot be done, it should be frequently aired by opening the windows in dry weather'. He goes on to qualify this advice with very specific suggestions and instructions for the mechanical ventilation of rooms using 'Air-tubes […] concealed under the floor of the room' and 'movable' 'Ventilators', which, he states, are 'an excellent contrivance to introduce fresh atmospheric air into a room, by occasionally opening and shutting the door'.[51]

As well as ventilating rooms with currents of air and mechanical equipment, there was a move for using recent discoveries about the symbiotic relationship between human and plant respiration to advantage. Building on the discoveries in the laboratory, Cornwell had pointed out in 1784 that, 'air is injured by candles, &c. burning in it, or by crowds of people breathing in it,' and suggested that, 'by the vegetation of plants, which imbibe the offending matter, injured air is in part restored to its former state.'[52] Willich gives more detail about how this might be achieved:

> Green plants and flowers placed before the windows are both an agreeable and useful ornament, if not of too strong a fragrance. In serene weather, it may be expedient to strew fresh plants (not flowers) in a dwelling-room, exposed to the rays of the sun, taking care, however, to remove them as soon as the sun withdraws. This method of exposing plants, or even the branches of trees with green leaves, in apartments, may have a beneficial influence on

[50] Simply having a lot of fresh air ventilating rooms was not necessarily enough. Another popular idea was the 'Air Bath', in which all clothes are removed and the whole body is exposed to the air for a short period of time. For more on this, see Willich, p. 249.
[51] Willich, p. 206; 207-08. Cervantes and Porter also discuss Stephen Hales's ventilation machines, particularly with reference to how they could be installed on slave ships, powered by the prisoners themselves (p. 105).
[52] Cornwell, p. 64; 65.

> valetudinarians, and particularly on asthmatic persons, as vital air, or *oxygen*, is thereby generated, and introduced very gradually into the lungs.[53]

The idea of using green plants specifically to oxygenate a room is applied to the home directly from reports of experiments in the laboratory.[54]

Excessive ventilation was not necessarily popular with everybody, however. The poor were too busy trying to keep warm to worry about breathing overlong in a stuffy room, as social historian Enid Gauldie notes: 'the reformer's obsession with ventilation, natural in view of the medical profession's belief that most infectious disease was air-borne, took little account of the poor family's great need for warmth.'[55] For the poor, surviving a cold winter was more important than sensibility. Similarly, the ability to move to a place of 'better air', or even to follow the good air around throughout the year, became popular with the middle and upper classes, but would have been impossible for the poorer working classes. Medical literature proposed improving the air in a domestic space, as I have shown, but also 'gave considerable attention to the 'election of air' as a preservative of respiratory, gastric, and nervous health.'[56]

The Pneumatic Institution

The Pneumatic Institution in Hotwells, Bristol, was initially established by Thomas Beddoes in 1798 to attempt to alleviate diseases of the lungs, such as consumption

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[53] Willich, p. 211.
[54] Two centuries later the American National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) report on *Interior Landscape Plants for Indoor Air Pollution Abatement* (known as the 'NASA Clear Air Study'), published in 1989, compiled a list of common indoor air-filtering plants, as part of its research into how to clean the air in space stations. Page two of the study states: 'If man is to move into closed environments on Earth or in space, he must take along nature's life support system' (B. C. Wolverton, Anne Johnson and Keith Bounds, *Interior Landscape Plants for Indoor Air Pollution Abatement* (National Aeronautics and Space Administration John C. Stennis Space Center, 1989) <https://ntrs.nasa.gov/archive/nasa/casi.ntrs.nasa.gov/19930073077.pdf> [accessed 17 October 2016]).
[55] Enid Gauldie, *Cruel Habitations: A History of Working-Class Housing 1780-1918* (London: Routledge, 1974), p. 93.
[56] Janković, p. 121; See also, Golinski, *British Weather,* p. 139.

(usually taken to mean tuberculosis), by administrating medicinal 'airs'.[57] Beddoes had spent time conducting geological research in Cornwall in 1791, and had come across numerous people who were unwell with lung conditions. Treatments of pulmonary illnesses at the time were not particularly effective – essentially being nothing more than palliative care, rather than actual treatment of the condition – and were generally available only to the wealthy, as they were expensive to carry out. Mike Jay notes:

> it had long been observed that some patients, particularly in the early stages, could win remission from [consumption and other medical infirmities] by a change of air: sea breezes, dry air and sunshine were all sought out in seaside and spa resorts or extended Alpine and Mediterranean travels.[58]

Healthy air was sought as medicine for the suffering patient, but, clearly, this option was not available to the majority of sufferers who could not afford Mediterranean holidays. Having observed the effect that a change in air could have, however, Beddoes began to wonder whether artificial airs might have the same result – he could use newly discovered airs (such as oxygen) to treat the lungs directly, and at the same time could continue experimentation into the effects of different airs on patients.

Humphry Davy joined the Institution in 1798 and developed his particular interest in nitrous oxide – commonly known as laughing gas – which he pursued with increasing alacrity.[59] Initially experimenting on animals, he began to use himself and other human subjects as he became more confident about the gas, and more intrigued by its specific mental and physical impacts. The normal work of the Institution was conducted during the day, and then, in the evening, experiments with different gases would begin. Using an oiled, green, silk bag from which to inhale the gas, Davy began

[57] Although the name of the Pneumatic Institution is related to its work on breath, pneumatology had for centuries been the word for the study of the soul (as discussed in the introduction, the Greek *pneuma* means both breath and spirit/soul).
[58] Mike Jay, *The Atmosphere of Heaven: The Unnatural Experiments of Dr Beddoes and his Sons of Genius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 28.
[59] Davy joined a few months after the institution started work in 1798, although it officially opened in 1799; nitrous oxide, or N_2O, is a colourless, almost odourless gas, which has a slightly sweet taste – it was originally discovered by Priestley in 1772 (for more detail, see: W. D. A. Smith, *Under the Influence: History of Nitrous Oxide and Oxygen Anaesthesia* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 11-18).

by experimenting on himself, before conducting research with the many willing volunteers who had begun to hear about the surprising sensations that resulted from taking the gas. These volunteers consisted largely of fashionable and literary society, and included individuals such as Coleridge, Robert Southey and Tom Wedgwood. Davy took detailed notes of his own sensations during these experiments, and of the observations and feedback from other participants in the trials.

Early experiments (the first in April 1799) showed Davy that he could safely breathe nitrous oxide – as he recorded in a letter to the editor of *Nicholson's Journal*: 'I have this day made a discovery, which, if you please, you may announce in your Physical Journal, namely that the nitrous phosoxyd or gaseous oxyd of azote, is respirable when perfectly freed from nitric phosoxyd [nitrous gas]' – and that the effects were intriguing:

> I felt a sense of tangible extension highly pleasurable in every limb [….] By degrees as the pleasurable sensations increased I lost all connection with external things; trains of vivid visible images rapidly passed through my mind and were connected with words in such a manner, as to produce perceptions perfectly novel. I existed in a world of newly connected and newly modified ideas. I theorised; I imagined that I made discoveries [….] As I recovered my former state of mind, I felt an inclination to communicate the discoveries I had made during the experiments [….] and with the most intense belief and prophetic manner, I exclaimed to Dr. Kinglake 'Nothing exists but thought! The Universe is composed of impressions, ideas, pleasures and pains!'[60]

During the intense period of experimentation at the Pneumatic Institution in 1799, Davy continued to record in his notes the sensations that arose within the mind and body from taking nitrous oxide. Experimenting on himself, he noted that the nitrous oxide 'made me dance about the laboratory as a madman, and has kept my spirits in a

[60] *The Collected Works of Sir Humphry Davy: Early Miscellaneous Papers, from 1799 to 1805*, ed. by John Davy, 9 vols (London: Elder Smith and Co. Cornhill, 1839-40) II (1839), 61n.; Humphry Davy, *Researches, Chemical and Philosophical; Chiefly Concerning Nitrous Oxide; or, Dephlogisticated Nitrous Air, and its Respiration* (London: J. Johnson, 1800), pp. 487-89.

glow ever since'.[61] Davy's discovery demonstrates that mental states are dependent on what is breathed, but that the communication of these states can be difficult.

Coleridge joined the experiments in the autumn of 1799, fresh from his time in Germany, and enjoyed the effect of nitrous oxide, which he said put him in a state 'of more unmingled pleasure than I had ever before experienced'.[62] Southey, similarly, was ecstatic after his first experience with the gas, and wrote about it to his brother Tom afterwards:

> O, Tom! Such a gas has Davy discovered, the gaseous oxyd! O, Tom! I have had some; it made me laugh and tingle in every toe and finger-tip. Davy has actually invented a new pleasure for which language has no name. O, Tom! I am going for more this evening; it makes one strong and so happy, so gloriously happy! O, excellent air-bag![63]

Here Southey expresses something that would be repeated again and again in different ways by Davy's volunteers (and which Davy himself had already attempted to articulate): the sense that ordinary language is not enough to express what was being experienced.[64] Those who had taken the gas strove to put their experience into words, reaching outside the norms of everyday language to do this.[65] James Thompson, one of the volunteers, stated, 'It is extremely difficult to convey to others by means of words, any idea of particular sensations, of which they have no experience,' and suggested that, 'We must either invent new terms to express these new and peculiar sensations, or attach new ideas to old ones, before we can communicate intelligibly with each other on the operation of this extraordinary gas.'[66] What these experiences suggested is that

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[61] Quoted in John Ayron Paris, *The Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), I, 56.
[62] Davy, *Researches*, p. 518.
[63] Quoted in Anne Treneer, *The Mercurial Chemist: A Life of Sir Humphry Davy* (London: Methuen, 1963), p. 44.
[64] Davy had already struggled with the 'poverty of language' when attempting to describe the ruined lungs of autopsied animals that had died from breathing nitrous oxide in his earlier experiments (see June Z. Fullmer, *Young Humphry Davy: The Making of an Experimental Chemist* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2000), p. 256).
[65] Including Peter Mark Roget, who would go on to compile *Roget's Thesaurus*.
[66] Davy, *Researches*, p. 515.

the world is, essentially, fashioned by our thinking. Language does not need to be constrained, although the idea of (re)fashioning language may seem revolutionary. Golinski notes that, in an attempt to 'find a vocabulary in which they could share descriptions of their feelings, the subjects resorted to an eclectic mix of physiological and philosophical terminology.'[67] Davy also turned to poetry to attempt to express these effects. He composed 'a large amount and variety of poems' while he was based at the Institution, which are interspersed in his notebooks with scientific notes and fragments.[68] 'On breathing the Nitrous Oxide', a short poem written in 1799 and not published during his lifetime, is an attempt to describe the sensation of breathing nitrous oxide, and the effects of the gas on his body:

> Not in the ideal dreams of wild desire
> Had I beheld a rapture wakening form
> My bosom burns with no unhallowed fire
> Yet is my cheek with rosy blushes warm
> Yet are my eyes with sparkling lustre filled
> Yet is my mouth implete with murmuring sound
> Yet are my limbs with inward transports thrill'd
> And clad with new born mightiness round –[69]

Davy attempts to describe the physical effects of the gas, yet suggests that he cannot quite convey what he has felt. As Sharon Ruston points out, 'the difficulty Davy has in describing the experience can be seen in the fact that he begins the poem by describing what it is not'. She continues, 'he is no longer completely in control of the words that he utters but in their utterance he finds new perceptions of the world.'[70] Davy's experiments with breathing this revolutionary gas led to experiments with language, to attempt to convey the experience.

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[67] Jan Golinski, *The Experimental Self: Humphry Davy and the Making of a Man of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 24.
[68] Wahida Amin, 'The Poetry and Science of Humphry Davy' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Salford, 2013), p. 93.
[69] Sharon Ruston's transcription, in: Sharon Ruston, 'The art of medicine: When respiring gas inspired poetry', *The Lancet*, 381 (2013), 366-67 (p. 367).
[70] Ruston, 'The art of medicine', p. 367.

This inability to put the experience of breathing the gas adequately into language garnered mocking responses, as Wahida Amin has shown.[71] For example, the satirical poem 'The Pneumatic Revellers: An Eclogue', published anonymously in the *Anti-Jacobin Review* in 1800 (but actually written by the Cornish historian and poet, Richard Polwhele), 'describes a seemingly fantastical nitrous oxide inhalation trial, parodying the literary characters involved and their writings':

> When I tried it, at first, on a learned society,
> Their giddiness seem'd to betray inebriety,
> Like grave Mandarins, their heads nodding together;
> But afterwards each was as light as a feather:
> And they, every one, cried, 'twas a pleasure extatic;
> To drink deeper draughts of the mighty pneumatic.
> As if by the wand of a wizard entranc'd,
> How wildly they shouted, and gambol'd, and danc'd![72]

Amin points out that 'Polwhele ridicules their inability to fully describe the phenomenon. His criticism is presumably a response to Davy's scientific notes and visitors' accounts published in *Researches* that showed their attempts to describe what seemed to be indescribable'.[73] Two years later, James Gillray's memorable cartoon, 'Scientific Researches! – New Discoveries in Pneumaticks! – or – an Experimental Lecture on the Powers of Air', reduces Davy's experiments (which he had taken on to the public stage in London as part of his lecture series at the Royal Institution) to something as far removed from language and thought at possible.

[71] Amin, pp. 98-99.
[72] Amin, p. 99; Anonymous, 'The Pneumatic Revellers: An Eclogue', *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, 6 (1800), 109-11 (p. 113).
[73] Amin, p. 99; see, also, Jay, *Atmosphere of Heaven*, pp. 208-9.

Figure 1: James Gillray, *Scientific Researches! – New Discoveries in Pneumaticks! – or – an Experimental Lecture on the Powers of Air* (1802)

Just as Swift satirised Hooke's experiments in the previous century from an enquiry into the vital principle to something scatological, Gillray here trivialises Davy's experiments so that they become flatulent entertainment.

Yet, embedded within some of the satirical responses are also more sincere observations. As well as ridiculing the participants at the Pneumatic Institution, Polwhele is also making a semi-serious point about the intense effects that breathing different 'airs' can have. The traditionally pastoral 'Eclogue' has here been transformed into something in which people become like 'wild', 'gambol[ing]' animals due to the effect of breathing a specific gas (as opposed to natural, atmospheric air).

Davy's experiments, and others' reactions to them, were a reminder that the permeable body and brain are receptive to (and, potentially, at risk from) the air that is breathed. Breathing can affect thought, and in Chapter 2 I examine in detail the way

that Coleridge, in his poetry, responded to the effects of different 'airs' upon the body and mind. The possibility that thoughts can be altered and shaped by breathing different gases, however, also suggests a darker aspect to these revolutionary ideas than Davy might originally have thought. Edmund Burke had already used the analogy of pneumatic chemistry to criticise the potentially destructive 'spirit of liberty' of the French revolutionaries, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790); the 'wild *gas*', he suggested, was difficult to contain or restrict.[74] Davy's experiments did not just deal with modified gases, but with ideas that could be modified by potentially malignant forces. This possibility was taken to extremes in delusional thought, as I explore in the next section.

The asylum

An association between breath and thought was pervasive enough around the turn of the century to make its way into the minds of people suffering from delusions, such as those incarcerated in the Royal Bethlem Hospital (commonly known as 'Bedlam'). One of Bedlam's most studied inmates is James Tilly Matthews, who believed that his thoughts were being controlled by an 'Air Loom' (influencing machine), operated by 'a gang of villains profoundly skilled in Pneumatic Chemistry' somewhere nearby in a basement by London Wall.[75] He had initially been committed to Bedlam on 28 January 1797 for loudly and publicly accusing the Home Secretary, Lord Liverpool, of 'Treason' from the viewing gallery of the House of Commons on 30 December 1796.

[74] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 8.
[75] John Haslam, *Illustrations of Madness: Exhibiting a Singular Case of Insanity, and a No Less Remarkable Difference of Medical Opinion: Developing the Nature of Assailment, and the Manner of Working Events; With a Description of the Tortures Experienced by Bomb-Bursting, Lobster-Cracking, and Lengthening the Brain. Embellished with a Curious Plate* (London: G. Hayden, 1810), pp. 19-20. The term 'influencing machine' was coined by Victor Tausk in 1919 (See: Victor Tausk, 'On the Origin of the "Influencing Machine" in Schizophrenia', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly,* 2 (1933), 519-556).

He believed that it was not just himself who was affected, but many others too, including important political figures and especially the Prime Minister, William Pitt. However, Matthews seemed perfectly sane when not assailed by the air loom's forces, and his case is now considered to be the first ever recorded of paranoid schizophrenia.[76] It was written up and published by John Haslam, resident apothecary at Bedlam, as *Illustrations of Madness: Exhibiting a Singular Case of Insanity, and a No Less Remarkable Difference of Medical Opinion: Developing the Nature of Assailment, and the Manner of Working Events; With a Description of the Tortures Experienced by Bomb-Bursting, Lobster-Cracking, and Lengthening the Brain. Embellished with a Curious Plate*, in 1810, and was based on Haslam's observations of – and many conversations with – Matthews. Although it appears neutral in tone, Haslam's style purposely attempts to discredit Matthews and promote the case for keeping him incarcerated, as Jay has shown.[77] It is not particularly clear when these experiences began for Matthews – he must have been in the grip of some delusions when he shouted out at the House of Commons – but in *Illustrations of Madness*, Haslam records Matthews claiming that, 'The assassins opened themselves by their voices to me about Michaelmas 1798.'[78]

Matthews's Air Loom was run by a gang of 'assassins,' which consisted of seven members: Bill the King, Jack the Schoolmaster, Sir Archy, the Middle Man, Augusta, Charlotte, and the Glove Woman.[79] Critics and historians have been quick to point out the importance of Revolutionary politics in Matthews's case; Matthews himself had been imprisoned in France during the Terror (until 1796), and had initially

[76] P. K. Carpenter, 'Descriptions of schizophrenia in the psychiatry of Georgian Britain: John Haslam and James Tilly Matthews', *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 30 (1989), 332-38.
[77] Mike Jay, *The Air Loom Gang: The Strange and True Story of James Tilly Matthews, his Visionary Madness and his Confinement in Bedlam* (London: Bantam Press, 2003), pp. 177-78.
[78] Haslam, *Illustrations of Madness*, p. 59.
[79] For more detailed information on the members of the gang, see Haslam, *Illustrations of Madness*, pp. 21-27.

been incarcerated in Bedlam because of his disruptive announcement in the House of Commons.[80] Furthermore, the characters of the Gang reveal Matthews's feeling that the air was pervaded by a repressive regime, including the power of the King (Bill the King), the aristocracy (Sir Archy), and education (Jack the Schoolmaster). In Matthews's mind, the very air was filled with authoritarian forces. The (aural) pun on 'Air Loom' / 'heirloom' is important here; monarchy, aristocracy, and (to some conceivable extent by this period) education, too, might all be considered social, metaphorical heirlooms, passed on as if by magic.

According to Haslam's account, Matthews believed that rays were being transmitted to his mind by means of pneumatic chemistry and magnetism, in what Roy Porter has termed 'a grotesque microcosm of the age.'[81] The Gang came together to power the machine, which was run on a gruesome distillation of gases and stenches:

> Seminal fluid, male and female – Effluvia of copper – ditto of sulphur – the vapours of vitriol and aqua fortis – ditto of nightshade and hellebore – effluvia of dogs – stinking human breath – putrid effluvia – ditto of mortification and of the plague – stench of the sesspool – gaz from the anus of the horse – human gaz – gaz of the horse's greasy heels – Egyptian snuff (this is a dusty vapour, extremely nauseous, but its composition has not been hitherto ascertained) – vapour and effluvia of arsenic – poison of toad – otto of roses and of carnation.[82]

As we have also seen with Swift, Smollett, and Gillray, Matthews too was preoccupied by the noxious aspects of gas, which here conspire to poison his mind, in an extreme adaptation of the way that unhealthy 'airs' could negatively affect the mind and body. The process of Matthews's Air Loom was achieved through the use of levers, which

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[80] See: Connor, *The Matter of Air*, pp. 44-101; Jay, *The Air Loom Gang*, pp. 1-19; Roy Porter, '"Under the Influence": Mesmerism in England', *History Today,* 35 (September 1985), 23-29.
[81] Porter, p. 27.
[82] Haslam, *Illustrations of Madness*, pp. 28-29; Connor points out that, 'Haslam is not alone in his interest in the cognitive effects of body gas', citing Thomas Beddoes's writings about nervous diseases in *Hygëia* (1803), an essay collection which looked at disease and health from a social point of view, following his experiments into and interest in pneumatic Chemistry. In *Hygëia*, Beddoes expressed concerns about taking too much oxygen in, which he worried worsened consumption through negatively affecting the mind: 'the air was the most important mediator between body and mind for Beddoes' (Connor, *The Matter of Air*, p. 58; 59). See also Neil Vickers, *Coleridge and the Doctors: 1795-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 46-60.

were operated by various members of the gang, and which seemed to be strangely linked to Matthews's breathing:

> The levers are placed at those points of elevation, *viz*. the one nearly down, at which I begin to let go my breath, taking care to make it regular, not in any way a hurried breathing. The other, the highest, is where it begins to strain the warp, and by which time it becomes necessary to have taken full breath, to hold till the lever was so far down again.[83]

Matthews makes the connection between breath and thought explicit as he goes on to describe the way that his mind was thus bombarded by a whole array of 'assailments' from the machine. These included:

> *Kiteing*: As boys raise a kite in the air, so these wretches, by means of the air-loom and magnetic impregnations, contrive to lift into the brain some particular idea, which floats and undulates in the intellect for hours together; and how much soever the person assailed may wish to direct his mind to other objects, and banish the idea forced upon him, he finds himself unable.
>
> *Lengthening the brain:* As the cylindrical mirror lengthens the countenance of the person who views himself in such glass, so the assailants have a method by which they contrive to elongate the brain. The effect produced by this process is a distortion of any idea in the mind, whereby that which had been considered as most serious becomes an object of ridicule. All thoughts are made to assume a grotesque interpretation; and the person assailed is surprised that his fixed and solemn opinions should take a form which compels him to distrust their identity and forces him to laugh at the most important subjects.
>
> *Thought-making*: While one of these villains is sucking at the brain of the person assailed, to extract his existing sentiments, another of the gang, in order to lead astray the sucker (for deception is practised among themselves as a part of their system; and there exists no honour, as amongst thieves, in the community of these rascals) will force into his mind a train of ideas very different from the real subject of his thoughts, and which is seized upon as the desired information by the person sucking; whilst he of the gang who has forced the thought on the person assailed, laughs in his sleeve at the imposition he has practised.[84]

The actions of the gang and the Air Loom are described in physical terms, but the effect on Matthews is mental.

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[83] Haslam, *Illustrations of Madness*, p. 43.
[84] Haslam, *Illustrations of Madness*, pp. 21; 31; 33-34; 34-35.

As well as describing the effects of the Air Loom on his mind, Matthews made detailed illustrations of it, which Haslam reproduced in his book.

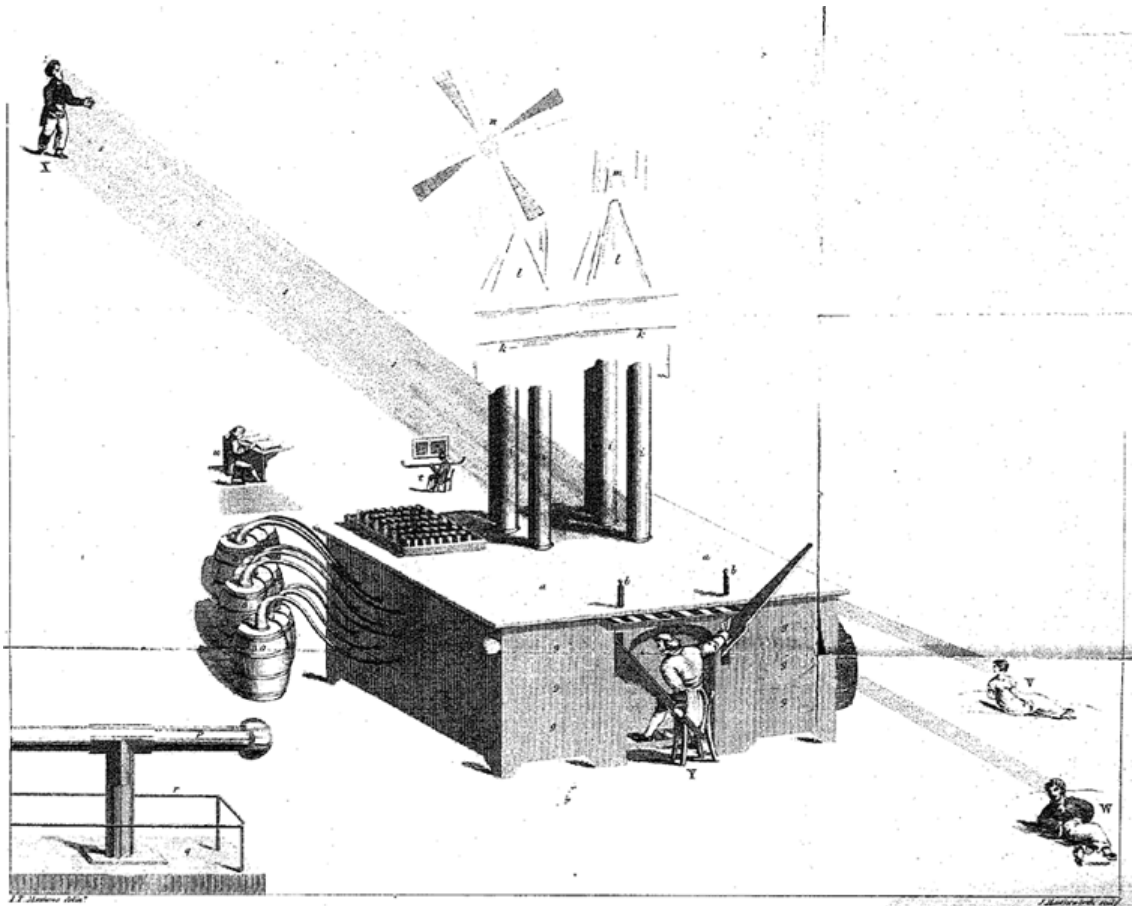

Figure 2: James Tilly Matthews, *Air Loom* (1810)

In this example, the Air Loom itself takes centre stage, while rays of air reach out to attack the various subjects of the gang's 'assailments'.[85] Jay notes that, 'where we might have expected to see crazed daubings and frenzied scribbles, we have instead a precise and beautiful image, which at first glance wouldn't be out of place in any scientific or technical journal of the time.' He continues, stating that, 'the technical accomplishment of Matthews's work merely assists Haslam in his drollery,' who goes on to label the drawings with 'mock-precision', as though they are real scientific

[85] Haslam, *Illustrations of Madness*, p. 21

illustrations.[86] In the original drawings it is palpable that the air is especially important for Matthews, as it is the only part of the illustration that is in colour (the rays of air are washed in green).[87] Matthews was also aware of the very real effects of the air on the bodies and minds of himself and his fellow inmates, however, and he also used his artistic ability to comment on, and attempt to affect, this fact.

Bedlam had been housed in the same building since 1676, and by the early nineteenth century surveyors had stated that an entire new building was needed.[88] In 1810 it was decided that the new site would be in Southwark, and that there would be a competition to produce the best design for the building and grounds (with financial prizes of up to £200). Matthews himself entered the competition with detailed designs, and although he did not win, he was paid £30 by the governors of Bedlam for his series of architectural drawings.[89] His designs focus on how Bedlam might be rebuilt to better house its inmates, especially with regards to their health and wellbeing. There is a focus on the salubriousness of air and how it would affect different inmates; for example, the women would be in the west wing, as it was 'open to the warmest and most salubrious winds, the being better able to endure the bleaker air.' Bedlam at this point was damp and cramped, and Matthews is careful to recommend a larger, more airy structure overall, that would 'purify the whole building by whatever wind may blow.'[90] As socio-medical advice in the later eighteenth century began to focus on healthy indoor air, and social commentators also turned to the salubrity of air in institutions such as

[86] Jay, *The Air Loom Gang*, p. 197; the precision of Matthews's drawings was such that a version of the machine has since been constructed by artist Rod Dickinson in 2002: Rod Dickinson, *The Air Loom (A Human Influencing Machine)* <www.theairloom.org> [accessed 20 January 2018].
[87] Unfortunately I could not locate a colour image in the public domain.
[88] See Jay, *The Air Loom Gang*, p. 245.
[89] In fact, none of the entries to the competition were deemed suitable, and the architect had to design his own version incorporating the best of what he had seen in the entries.
[90] Quoted in Jay, *The Air Loom Gang*, p. 251; 254.

prisons and hospitals, so Matthews here is attentive to the relationship between air and architecture as a way to offer better health and comfort.

Although his case is the best known and most carefully recorded, Matthews was not alone in experiencing delusions that involved air, breath and thought. Haslam had already published *Observations on Madness and Melancholy: Including Practical Remarks on Those Diseases; Together With Cases: And An Account of the Morbid Appearances on Dissection* in 1809, in which he had noted more generally that, 'the insane sometimes insist that malicious agents contrive to blow streams of infected air' into the ear.[91] Another detailed, although slightly later, case of similar delusions was that of John Thomas Perceval (son of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval), who was incarcerated for three years at Brislington House, near Bristol, and Ticehurst House, Sussex. He wrote afterwards of his own experiences, and, like Matthews, later focused on improving the state of mental asylums. His account, *A narrative of the treatment experienced by a Gentleman during a state of mental derangement designed to explain the causes and nature of insanity, and to expose the injudicious conduct pursued towards many unfortunate sufferers under that calamity,* was published in 1838. Like Matthews, Perceval focused on breathing and air as a major component of his delusions. The exact nature of Perceval's delusions is not so clear as Matthews's, but they were often of a religious nature, and encouraged him to self-harm. Perceval states that,

> when I was desired to suffocate myself on my pillow, and that all the world were suffocating for me, &c. &c., I conceive, now, that the spirit referred to the suffocation of my feelings – that I was to suffocate my grief, my indignation, or what not, on the pillow of my conscience.

[91] John Haslam, *Observations on Madness and Melancholy: Including Practical Remarks on Those Diseases; Together With Cases: And An Account of the Morbid Appearances on Dissection* (London: J. Callow, 1809), p. 68.

He continues, stating that, whenever his 'bodily health ha[d] been deranged' he had 'been more than usually troubled by these fancies, particularly if at the same time, through sluggishness or through cold, [he had] not been breathing through [his] nostrils, or drawing deep breaths.' This close association between physical and mental anxieties about suffocation is also evident outside the asylum, and is a key focus of Chapter 3, in which I discuss Coleridge's similar concerns. Perceval concludes his narrative: 'I believe the healthy state of mind depends very much upon the regulation of the inspiration and expiration.'[92] This is an extraordinarily clear observation of the connection between breathing and mental states.

Anaesthetics: between life and death

In the previous two sections I have examined different developments and associations between breath and thought, through the use of nitrous oxide in the Pneumatic Institution, and then taken to extremes during delusional states in the asylum. What Davy's experiments also brought into consideration however, was the possibility of being able to open up new space between life and death; while nitrous oxide made one seem more alive, it also put its users into an unconscious state when overindulged in. This liminal space would only increase with the introduction of nitrous oxide (and other substances) as an anaesthetic in the nineteenth century. Sadie Plant describes how, 'as the nineteenth century progressed, a proliferation of new techniques allowed the living to approach death without tipping over the fatal line […] Now bodies really could be suspended on the edge of life and death'.[93] The journey to this point was complicated.

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[92] John Thomas Perceval, *A narrative of the treatment experienced by a Gentleman during a state of mental derangement designed to explain the causes and nature of insanity, and to expose the injudicious conduct pursued towards many unfortunate sufferers under that calamity* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1838), p. 271; 293; 271-72.
[93] Sadie Plant, *Writing on Drugs* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), p. 51.

It would not be until the 1860s that nitrous oxide was routinely used as an anaesthetic in surgical operations, despite numerous suggestions and individual cases earlier on. During the majority of Coleridge's and Tennyson's careers, therefore, suspended animation and anaesthesia existed as lingering possibilities. As I will examine in relation to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge was fascinated by such states of suspended animation (or Life-in-Death), while Tennyson, in *In Memoriam*, acutely observes the particular out-of-body experience that can be brought on by deep grief; in Section XII, when he finds himself to have become 'a weight of nerves without a mind', he pictures himself leaving his body to 'circle moaning in air', only to discover later 'that [he has] been an hour away' (7; 15; 20).

Davy himself had found that breathing nitrous oxide relieved headaches and toothache, and had suggested using it during surgery. In *Researches,* he describes how on one occasion, when he 'had a headache from indigestion, it was immediately removed by the effects of a large dose of gas; though it afterwards returned, but with much less violence'. He continues, 'In a second instance, a slighter degree of headache was wholly removed by two doses of gas'. On the next page, he describes experimenting with nitrous oxide to numb the pain of toothache:

> The power of immediate operation of the gas in removing intense pain, I had very good opportunity of ascertaining.
>
> In cutting one of the unlucky teeth called dentes sapiente, I experienced an intense inflammation of the gum, accompanied with great pain, which equally destroyed the power of repose and of consistent action.
>
> On the day when the inflammation was most troublesome, I breathed three large doses of nitrous oxide. The pain always diminished after the first four or five inspirations; the thrilling came on as usual, and uneasiness was for a few minutes swallowed up in pleasure.

With these experiences in mind, he tentatively suggested that, 'as nitrous oxide in its extensive operation appears capable of destroying physical pain, it may probably be used with advantage during surgical operations in which no great effusion of blood

takes place.'[94] However, this suggestion is buried over a hundred pages after his descriptions of using it to numb his own pains, and was not adopted into mainstream medicine at the time.

References in a number of writings in the early nineteenth century suggest there were some other early adopters of nitrous oxide for anaesthesia, at least on a minor level. For example, the author of *Dissertation on the Chymical Properties and Exhilarating Effects of Nitrous Oxide* (1808) noted that he had breathed nitrous oxide after 'accidentally striking [his head] against the sharp edge of a door,' and concluded that, 'I am decidedly of the opinion with Mr. Davy, that this gas has the power of removing intense physical pain.'[95] Another suggestion that the breathing of nitrous oxide may have been used for the relief of pain in the early nineteenth century was put forward by Parsons Shaw in 1889 (and again in 1893), based particularly on his readings of *Doctor Syntax in Paris; or, A Tour in Search of the Grotesque*, published around 1820.[96] He quotes from the poem:

> Dolly cries, 'My jaws do burn,
> I've caught the toothache from the damp,
> So to the doctor let us tramp.'
> 'Here lives, my dear, a skilful man,'
> Said Syntax, 'called Le Charlatan.'
> [….]
> Le Charlatan, with knowing grin,
> Welcomed his patient, heard her case,
> Received his fee, and took his place
> [....]
> Our dentist quickly twisted out
> The offending tooth, and Dolly rose.
> Le Charlatan observed, 'Suppose,
> Madam, you sniff some nitrous gas
> To assuage the torments of your face.' (4-8; 20-22; 57-61)[97]

[94] Davy, *Researches*, p. 464; 465; 556.
[95] William P. C. Barton, *A Dissertation on the Chymical Properties and Exhilarating Effects of Nitrous Oxide Gas; and its Application to Pneumatick Medicine* (Philadelphia: Lorenzo Press, 1808), p. 74.
[96] See Smith, p. 33.
[97] Quoted in Smith, p. 33.

Shaw suggests that, 'there can be little doubt that this description was drawn from facts, and that in either London or Paris (probably in London) some person, as early as 1820, united gas administration with tooth drawing.'[98] However, although these examples are important, they are overwhelmed in volume by the 'tide of popular experimentation and the entertainment value of the 'exhilarating gas"', which took the focus away from its possible practical application.[99] It would be decades before it came to be used with regularity in surgical operations.

This delay can seem baffling, especially considering Davy's explicit suggestion about its practical use. Golinski posits that, 'part of the reason is probably' that nitrous oxide 'was not inhaled in sufficiently high concentrations to produce anaesthesia. But it was also the case that Davy and his friends were not predisposed to construe their experience in such terms.'[100] Another reason for its slow adoption was, Smith suggests, 'a long-suffering acceptance of pain, and of the improbability of its relief during surgical operations, [which] probably contributed to the delay.'[101] Furthermore, while the fact of (and necessity for) this pain was widely accepted, it was not necessarily discussed in detail, meaning that accounts that do survive of being operated upon without anaesthetic are striking. Frances Burney memorably wrote about her experience of undergoing a double mastectomy without anaesthetic (except for a wine cordial) in 1811. Her memories of the feeling when 'the dreadful steel was plunged into the breast – cutting through veins – arteries – flesh – nerves' and the sensation of the 'Knife <rack>ling against the breast bone – scraping it […] while I yet remained in utterly speechless torture,' are shocking to read, but the experience itself would not

[98] Quoted in Smith, p. 33.
[99] Santiago Colás, 'Aesthetics vs. Anaesthetic: How Laughing Gas Got Serious', *Science as Culture*, 7 (1998), 335-53 (p. 348).
[100] Golinski, *The Experimental Self*, p. 28.
[101] Smith, p. 19.

have been unique.[102] When Henry Hill Hickman argued for the importance of exploring anaesthesia in 1824, in *A Letter on Suspended Animation*, 'there was a widespread scepticism about the notion that a living, feeling organism could be numbed to the point of unconsciousness and then revived and resensitized.'[103] Hickman was so much in favour of the advantages of total anaesthesia that he even volunteered to try it himself, stating that, 'the hitherto most agonizing, dangerous and delicate surgical operations, may now be performed, with perfect safety, and exemption from pain, on brute animals in a state of suspended animation,' and 'that the same salutary effects may be produced on the human frame, when rendered insensible by means of the introduction of certain gases into the lungs.'[104] In 1844, dentist Horace Wells noticed that someone under the influence of nitrous oxide did not appear to feel pain on sustaining an injury, so decided to experiment upon himself. After breathing nitrous oxide he had one of his teeth pulled out by a colleague, which he reported to be a painless experience.[105] Yet, even so, it would be another twenty years before this sort of surgical procedure under the influence of nitrous oxide would become mainstream.

The possibility of using nitrous oxide as an anaesthetic offered the suggestion that it is possible to separate mental activity from the body. Although Davy had found that the gas affected sensations, and did physically affect the body in some ways, when taken in large enough dosages the gas could put the mind into a state of suspended animation, while the body remained alive. Yet, while medical applications of this discovery were slow, practical, directed uses of breath and air were being developed in other areas, further complicating and destabilising traditional notions regarding the boundaries between life and death.

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[102] *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney,* ed. by Joyce Hemlow, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972-84), VI (1975), 612.
[103] Plant, p. 53.
[104] Quoted in Plant, p. 53.
[105] See Smith, p. 8.

Resuscitation

While there was little thought of putting people into a state of suspended animation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was work and support going into the possibilities of removing them from such a state, through the application of breath.[106] In 1745, Quaker physician John Fothergill gave a lecture at the Royal Society of London, inspired by a short essay by Scottish physician William Tossach. Tossach had blown 'as strong as I could' into the lungs of an apparently dead miner who had then recovered, and Luke Davidson asserts that Tossach's essay is the first published medical account of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Fothergill stated that this was the first time that such a practice had been employed for 'the happy purpose of rescuing life from such imminent danger', and he suggested it might successfully be used on the drowned.[107]

There are intimations of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation in the Bible (Genesis 2. 7, I Kings 17. 21-22; II Kings 4. 32-35), and it is known to have been used by midwives in the middle ages, but it was really in the second part of the eighteenth century that it started to be promoted as a practical option for the layperson.[108] While Fothergill had suggested this as a possibility in 1745, it was not until 1774 that the Royal Humane Society was founded under its original name: the Society for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned. The Society was founded by physician William Hawes, Thomas Cogan, and thirty other friends, and its object was to recover everybody who had 'in an

[106] For a detailed account of the history of resuscitation, and especially the Royal Humane Society, see Luke Davidson, 'Raising up humanity: a cultural history of resuscitation and the Royal Humane Society of London, 1774-1808' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 2001).
[107] Both quoted in Luke Davidson, 'The Kiss of Life in the Eighteenth Century: the Fate of an Ambiguous Kiss,' in *The Kiss in History*, ed. by Karen Harvey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 98-121 (p. 98).
[108] See L. H. Hawkins, 'The History of Resuscitation', *British Journal of Hospital Medicine*, 4 (1970), 495-500 (p. 496).

instant *been numbered amongst the dead*'.[109] It focused its attentions on drowning, as this was the most common reason for unexpected deaths in London at the time, but suggested a move away from what Davidson refers to as 'traditional methods [of resuscitation, which] were primarily hanging the victim up by the heels or rolling him or her over a barrel'.[110] J. P. Payne indicates that the Society was largely influenced by 'the example of a Dutch Society set up in Amsterdam in 1767', and it was certainly not unique.[111]

The Royal Humane Society's original name is a reminder that its focus was to attempt to resuscitate the '*apparently* drowned: those who looked drowned, but were not'.[112] The difference between 'apparent death' and 'absolute death', as outlined by Dr James Curry in *Observations on Apparent Death from Drowning, Hanging, Suffocation by Noxious Vapours, Fainting-Fits, Intoxication, Lightning, Exposure to Cold, &c. &c* (1792), is that 'in *absolute* death, the Vital Principle is completely extinguished, whilst in *apparent* death, it only lies dormant, and may again be roused into action, and the person thereby completely restored to life and health.'[113]

Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation was, unsurprisingly, somewhat slow to gain popular approval as, 'suddenly in 1774, a small society was asking people to change their attitudes and activities before apparently dead and drowned bodies'.[114] Davidson outlines some of the issues that made it difficult to instil this as common practice. He writes that, 'the practice of bringing a mouth upon an apparently drowned person's mouth was deemed disgusting and inappropriate', and points out that this is partly due

[109] Quoted in Davidson, 'Raising up humanity', p. 26.
[110] See Davidson, 'Raising up humanity', pp. 26-27; 34.
[111] J. P. Payne, 'On the Resuscitation of the Apparently Dead: An Historical Account', *Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons of England,* 45 (1969), 98-107 (p. 103).
[112] Davidson, 'Raising up humanity', p. 16.
[113] James Curry, *Observations on Apparent Death from Drowning, Hanging, Suffocation by Noxious Vapours, Fainting-Fits, Intoxication, Lightning, Exposure to Cold, &c. &c.* (London: E. Cox & Son, 1792; repr. 1815), p. 1.
[114] Davidson, 'Raising up humanity', p. 11.

to hygiene (a 'radical increase in sugar and chocolate consumption' made teeth bad; also, people were regularly using mercury to treat syphilis, which 'led to stained teeth, bad breath and twice the normal levels of salivation'). Furthermore, the mouths of drowned people were often filled with 'froth and detritus', which made the idea of putting one's mouth against theirs particularly unappealing.[115] Richard Lee suggests that this was also partly a 'fear of contagion', which was 'reinforced by recurrent epidemic diseases'.[116] In 1796, J. D. Herholdt and C. G. Rafn wrote:

> But as the insufflation of Air by mouth is a very Toilsome and Loathsome Act, and since accordingly an otherwise laudable delicacy of feeling usually prohibits the Physician and other People of Propriety from using this method, especially in adults or People of advanced years who have been drowned, it is only of little use.[117]

Davidson records that potential rescuers were particularly averse to treating adults, and he suggests that as well as the threat of venereal disease, 'one can only offer the idea that the gesture of blowing into the mouth too clearly resembled the kiss of love'. He states that because 'kissing on the mouth was not, to my knowledge, conduct presented outside the bedroom', so mouth-to-mouth resuscitation would have seemed to be an even more uncomfortable prospect. [118] The Society, he points out, had anticipated this issue, as it suggested in its initial set of directions that, 'the medium of a handkerchief or cloth may be used to render the operation less indelicate.'[119]

The Royal Humane Society was not, in fact, wedded to the method of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and stopped recommending it for some decades around the turn of the century. This amendment seems to have been due to a concern that there was not

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[115] Davidson, 'Raising up humanity', pp. 297; 298.
[116] Richard V. Lee, 'Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation in the Eighteenth Century: A Historical Perspective on Present Practice', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 27 (1970) 418-33 (419).
[117] J. D. Herholdt and C. G. Rafn, *An Attempt at an Historical Survey of Life-Saving Measures for Drowning Persons and Information of the Best Means by which they can again be Brought Back to Life*, trans Donald W. Hannah and A. Rousing (Aarhuus: Aarhuus Stiftsbogtrykkerie, 1960), [n.p.].
[118] Davidson, 'Raising up humanity', pp. 299; 300.
[119] Quoted in Davidson, 'Raising up humanity', p. 300.

really enough oxygen in the out-breath to be useful. In 1812 the Society wrote in its *Annual Report*: 'As the air expired by the most healthy is not pure air, but chiefly carbonic, or what arises from burning charcoal, it is more likely to destroy than to promote the action of the lungs, and hence should be avoided.'[120] Yet this change in recommendation does not seem to have filtered into all textbooks and literature on the subject. For example, in *The Universal Family Physician, and Surgeon. Containing a Familiar and Accurate Description of The Symptoms of every Disorder incident to Mankind; Together with Their gradual Progress, and Method of Cure* (1798), by Smythson and others, the section called 'Recovery of Drowned Persons' advises: 'to renew the breathing a strong person may blow his own breath into the patient's mouth with all the force he can, holding his nostrils at the same time'. A bellows is offered as an alternative option 'if the lungs cannot be inflated in this manner'.[121] Even thirty years later, in 1827, Thomas John Graham's *Modern Domestic Medicine; or, a Popular Treatise, Illustrating the Character, Symptoms, Causes, Distinction, and Correct Treatment, of all Diseases Incident to the Human Frame*, recommends mouth-to-mouth ventilation before mentioning bellows. In the chapter entitled 'Of Suspended Animation', the treatment for 'suffocation by drowning' states:

> But as a restoration of the action of the lungs is chiefly and directly to be aimed at, a full expiration of warm air from the lips of a by-stander should be repeatedly forced into the patient's mouth, and his nostrils held closed to prevent its escape by that channel. Inflation may also be attempted by a pair of common bellows; or which is far better, if it can be readily procured, by a pair of bellows communicating with a pipe introduced through the nose or mouth into the windpipe.[122]

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[120] *Annual Report of the Royal Humane Society for the Recovery of the Apparently Drowned for the Year 1812* (London: J. Nichols and Son, 1812), p 27.
[121] Smythson and others, *The Universal Family Physician, and Surgeon. Containing a Familiar and Accurate Description of The Symptoms of every Disorder incident to Mankind; Together with Their gradual Progress, and Method of Cure* (Blackburn: Hemingway and Nuttall, 1798), p. 460.
[122] Thomas John Graham, *Modern Domestic Medicine; or, a Popular Treatise, Illustrating the Character, Symptoms, Causes, Distinction, and Correct Treatment, of all Diseases Incident to the Human Frame*, 3rd edn (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1827), p. 170.

The Society itself was aware of this continued use of the breath for resuscitation, despite its own amendments. Its 1824 Annual Report states that, it 'frequently happens that when persons have been called to subjects under suspended animation and where an apparatus is not at hand they have endeavoured to promote the action of the lungs by forcible breathing through the mouth'.[123] By early 1837 the Society's recommendations changed again when it, in fact, stopped recommending the use of bellows, as concerns became widespread about the potential damage that bellows might cause to the lungs. As understanding developed and the science of breathing and technologies improved, so the possibilities of different kinds of breathing emerged and shifted. If natural breathing was not possible, consideration was given to human breath, artificially administered (mouth-to-mouth resuscitation), and to mechanically-generated breath (bellows).

Was mouth-to-mouth resuscitation popular? Davidson suggests that 'resuscitation did generate excitement and "fuss"'.[124] He acknowledges that 'this is not to say that by 1808 everyone knew of the possibility of recovery, approved of it, or had learned the methods of direction in full', but he does point out that the 'idea of resuscitation effectively stopped being controversial by the early 1800s'.[125]

The idea of raising the dead in poetry gained new forms of perspective during the nineteenth century (in, for example, dramatic monologue), and in Chapter 4 I offer a detailed reading of literary engagement with (mouth-to-mouth) resuscitation as a way of revivifying the dead.

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[123] Quoted in Hawkins, p. 497.
[124] Davidson, 'Raising up humanity', p. 313; Davidson here refers to resuscitation in terms of all methods, not (just) mouth-to-mouth ventilation.
[125] Davidson, 'Raising up humanity', p. 316; 317.

Ventriloquism

Whereas mouth-to-mouth resuscitation involves breathing into someone so as to restore to them their own breath and to bring them back to life from a state of suspended animation, ventriloquism seeks to appear to give life to something else via the use of the breath. Ventriloquism, as it is usually understood, is when someone pretends not to be speaking (or making sounds), but actually is the agent of the speech or sounds that those observing can hear. The ventriloquist 'throws their voice' so that it seems as though, when they speak, their voice comes from far away, from under the floor, from a pocket, or from a doll or dummy. Ventriloquism, from the Latin 'ventriloquus' ('to speak from the belly'), has a long history, although its exact definition has changed over time.[126] Something very like ventriloquism appears in Isaiah 8. 19 (the 'wizards that peep, and that mutter'), and James A. Hodgson advises that, 'In its beginnings, the ventriloquial voice is bodiless, supernatural. The supposed speaker is a spirit or ghost'.[127] It was often associated with witchcraft, although from the later sixteenth century onwards, more rational explanations began to be offered. As Valentine Vox notes, an entry in Blount's dictionary (1688) shows that people were still deciding on how rationally or superstitiously to view ventriloquism: 'Ventriloquist: One who hath an evil spirit speaking from his belly or, one that can by use and practice speak as it were out of his belly.' Vox comments, 'this division is significant; on one hand, ventriloquism is seen as a harmless acquired practice, while, on the other, it is regarded as demonic possession.'[128] It was only in the late eighteenth century that ventriloquism as performance began to be explored: this was a turning point towards entertainment

[126] '<*ventri-* , *venter* belly + *loquī* to speak': 'ventriloquist' and 'ventriloquus', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 1 October 2018]
[127] John A. Hodgson, 'An Other Voice: Ventriloquism in the Romantic Period', *Romanticism on the Net*, 16 (1999) <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/ron/1999-n16-ron428/005878ar/> [accessed 29 October 2017].
[128] Valentine Vox, *I Can See Your Lips Moving: The History and Art of Ventriloquism* (Tadworth: Kaye & Ward, 1981), p. 32.

from its association with spiritual or mystic practices, and was also when the ventriloquist's dummy, or doll (which is now most associated with ventriloquism), came into being.[129]

Baron von Mengen, the Austrian ventriloquist who first introduced a doll to the ventriloquist act, explains in a letter in 1770 exactly how he managed his craft:

> I press the tongue against the teeth and the left cheek, and the voice seemingly articulated by the doll's mouth really is formed between my mouth, teeth and left cheek. For this purpose, I have to take the precaution of always keeping in reserve a portion of air enough for singing or talking, without the belly or stomach taking part in any manner. This enables me to articulate all the syllables very clearly without any movement of the lips.[130]

Yet despite the fact that dolls were already being used in the later eighteenth century, they were slow to become popular, and even in the 1830s 'ventriloquists featured what is now called the distant voice, emphasizing their ability to make a voice seem to come from a point at some significant distance from the performer.'[131] This does not mean that ventriloquism as entertainment in general was not popular, however, but rather that the uncanny possibility of it was as important as the entertainment factor. As Hodgson notes:

> the early nineteenth century was a golden age of ventriloquism. After having been a rare (and rarely discussed) as well as mysterious phenomenon for centuries, ventriloquism rather suddenly developed at this time into a matter of great public interest […] The temporary prominence of ventriloquism in this period was in part due to the ambiguity of its character [….] Was it a genuine phenomenon, or was it illusory; was it natural, or preternatural?[132]

In fact, alongside its development as a popular stage act, ventriloquism also contributed to the increased interest in mediumship and spiritualism in the nineteenth century. Leigh Schmidt describes this meeting point: 'The favourite target of illusionists […]

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[129] See Vox, p. 47.
[130] Quoted in Vox, p. 41.
[131] Hodgson.
[132] Hodgson; discussing Coleridge, James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate note that ventriloquism 'is one of C's favourite terms' (*The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions,* ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), II, 135n).

were Spiritualists, and various stage magicians made a popular show out of their exposure of mediums. In these contests, ventriloquism intruded as a rationalistic explanation of spirit voices.'[133] Ventriloquism offered the possibility of merging entertainment with spiritual practice by exploiting the effectiveness of both.

Like ventriloquism, poetry can present a version of throwing the voice, or lending the breath; in Chapter 4 I explore the ways in which poetry offers an alternative (but still problematic) possibility of revivifying the dead.

Dust: breathing in the body

That the living, breathing poet might lend breath to the afterlife of the dead was one expression of a wider nineteenth-century interest in ideas of human permanence. Alongside questions of spiritual permanence (which might offer the possibility for grieving relatives to reconnect with their dead loved ones), there were also developing interests in the substantial, lasting, human body. One growing area of realisation was the fact that human remains comprised much of the 'dust' that could be seen around houses and that was visible in the air. By breathing the air, it began to be understood, one was actually breathing in bits of other people, living and dead. In 1898, when natural historian Alfred Russel Wallace published a retrospective study of the nineteenth century, *The Wonderful Century: Its Successes and its Failures*, he devoted an entire chapter to 'The Importance of Dust'.[134] Dust permeates the literature, from articles such as 'Dust Ho!' in *Good Words* (1866), which considers in detail the contents of a dust heap, to Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65), which may

[133] Leigh Schmidt, 'From Demon Possession to Magic Show: Ventriloquism, Religion, and the Enlightenment', *Church History,* 67 (June 1998), 274-304 (p. 299).
[134] Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Wonderful Century: Its Successes and its Failures* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1898)

originally have been named '*Dust'*.[135] H. P. Malet's *Incidents in the Biography of Dust* (1877) has dust particles address the reader directly, and irreverently describe how they are lying around the house, for example on 'The Bible, on which we love to rest because the chances of disturbance are so often few'.[136] In 'The Dust in a Sunbeam', published in *Once a Week* in 1860, the author supposes that their readers 'must frequently have watched the whirling cloud of dust in the sunbeam aslant a somewhat darkened room; and perhaps were a little staggered at this sudden revelation of the invisible air not being quite so pure as [they] had imagined.'[137]

The interest in dust was partly due to scientific advances, and Kate Flint notes how important developments in microscope technology were in terms of being able to study dust in more detail.[138] These possibilities are stated overtly by the author of 'The Dust in a Sunbeam':

> Suppose we examine this dust, and see of what it is composed? Restrain your surprise: the thing is perfectly feasible. The dust was invisible and unsuspected till the revealing sunbeam made us aware of its presence; and now the Microscope, which deals with the invisible, shall reveal its nature.[139]

The scientific interest in dust developed through the second half of the century particularly. Flint states that over the course of the nineteenth century, scientists – including Christian Ehrenberg in 1847, Schroeber and Dusch in the late 1850s, Louis Pasteur, and then John Tyndall in the late 1860s – had been developing 'a series of increasingly refined experiments to determine [the] composition' of dust.[140] One particularly notable aspect of these experiments was the focus on the amount of dust that was human in origin, being partially composed of fragments of human skin, hair

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[135] Anonymous, 'Dust Ho!', *Good Words*, 7 (1866), 645-48; see: Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 43.
[136] H. P. Malet, *Incidents in the Biography of Dust* (London: Trübner & Co., 1877), p. 14.
[137] L., 'The Dust in a Sunbeam', *Once a Week*, 2:29 (1860), 50-53 (p. 50).
[138] Flint, p. 60.
[139] L., 51.
[140] Flint, p. 42.

and other physical matter. In *God's Acre, or Historical Notices Relating to Churchyards* (1858), Elizabeth Stone 'actually attempted to calculate the percent of London dust that had once been human.'[141]

The idea of human bodies physically disintegrating into dust was, of course, familiar. The Bible taught that everyone came from the dust ('And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground', Genesis 2. 7), and returned to the dust at the end of their life ('In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return', Genesis 3. 19; 'All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again', Ecclesiastes 3. 20). As the early nineteenth-century evangelical preacher Edward Bickersteth put it:

> What are the bodies of the millions that have peopled our earth? [...] Mingled with the dust on which those now living are moving and treading. Where are the myriads that have inhabited this busy and crowded metropolis from century to century; they are mouldering in the dust, and they are mingled with the earth.[142]

Yet the nineteenth century was particularly fascinated by the way that this dust did not just remain in the earth, but was everywhere – in the street, in the home, and in the air – and was continually breathed in by the living. In 1871, in 'Dust and Disease', John Tyndall described in gruesome detail the way that dust – and particularly the dust which once belonged to the bodies of others – is a very physical part of our atmosphere and is therefore constantly being breathed into the lungs.[143] Quoting Tyndall, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst explains these findings:

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[141] Christopher Hamlin, 'Good and Intimate Filth', in *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life*, ed. by William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2005) pp. 3-29 (p. 3).
[142] Quoted in Hamlin, p. 3.
[143] John Tyndall, 'Dust and Disease', in *Fragments of Science for Unscientific People: A Series of Detached Essays, Lectures and Reviews* (New York: D. Appleton and Co, 1871), pp. 275-328; see also Hamlin, p. 3.

> Tyndall noted that half the dust caked onto the walls of the British Museum was inorganic matter, and concluded that 'the visible particles floating in the air of London rooms' were likely to be the dry flakes of skin which we shed in our movements through the world. Even before we die, we create clouds of dust. Once these particles have been 'winnowed from the heavier matter' by air currents, Tyndall suggests, they will be concentrated in or diffused by other bodies, as they seep into the lungs of the living or are propelled by them into the atmosphere:
>
> 'However ordinary daylight may permit it to disguise itself, a sufficiently powerful beam causes dust suspended in air to appear almost as semi-solid. Nobody could, in the first instance, without repugnance, place the mouth at the illuminated focus of the electric beam and inhale the thickly-massed dust revealed there. Nor is the repugnance abolished by the reflection that, although we do not see the floating particles, we are taking them into our lungs every hour and minute of our lives.'[144]

Tyndall's description of the way that both the living and the dead become dust is linked specifically to the fact that these 'visible particles floating in the air' are continually being breathed in by everyone, even if the immediate thought of doing this – having seen the particles and contemplated their human origin – creates a sense of 'repugnance.' The realisation that, 'we are taking [the floating particles] into our lungs every hour and minute of our lives', may seem revolting, but it is ceaselessly occurring throughout the world. Usually invisible, these particles of human matter create a connection between people, as the living breathe in the physical debris of both living and dead bodies, only to also shed flakes of skin and bits of hair, which will then be breathed in by others.

A decade later, in 1881, Dr Alfred S. Carpenter addressed a medical conference in Brighton on the subject of 'Domestic Health', where he told the delegates that 'carpets, curtains, and comforts of all kinds retained the debris from our skin and our pulmonary membranes' and that 'the excreta from our sweat glands are allowed to settle on our uncleaned windows, on out of the way cornices, useless ledges, and so-

[144] Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 87.

called architectural and upholstering ornaments.'[145] In his view, both the outside and the inside of people's bodies created dust that would settle in the home and other spaces. Even as people breathed out, their 'pulmonary membranes' would shed 'debris' into the atmosphere, and combine with bits of skin and other traces of the person. Thus, what people breathe in would naturally include the 'debris' from the lining of other people's lungs, as well as from other people's skin. The apparently insubstantial air being breathed in and out actually contained physical fragments from inside other people, which they had breathed out.

The increased curiosity about (and awareness of) dust was, as I have shown, something that also made its way into the literature of the nineteenth century, and Dickens took a particularly keen interest. As well as writing about dust in general, he was also fascinated by the fact that people breathe in the dust of others, although he tended to focus on the dust of the dead, rather than the living. Douglas-Fairhurst addresses the ways that Dickens engaged with the idea of people breathing in the dust of the dead:

> We are environed by other people, Dickens notes, but we also physically environ them, as we breathe in floating particles from those most intimate of Victorian dust-heaps: the dead. Writing in *The Uncommercial Traveller* about his visits to churches, Dickens observes with interest how the congregation coughs and sneezes as 'a strong kind of invisible snuff' drifts up from the pulverized corpses stored in the vaults (ch. 9), while in *Oliver Twist,* Mr Sowerberry has as a snuff-box 'an ingenious little model of a patent coffin' (ch. 4).[146]

As breath and death are connected at the end of life (dying breaths, final breaths), so breath and the dead are here connected in a macabre sort of social reciprocity. The dust of dead bodies is breathed in by the living (who, unlike the dead, are still breathing), who will themselves breathe their last and come to dust, to be breathed in by others.

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[145] Alfred S. Carpenter, 'Domestic Health', in *Transactions of the Brighton Health Congress, 1881* (London: E. Marlborough and Co, 1881), p. 228.
[146] Douglas-Fairhurst, p. 87.

Even the seemingly insubstantial air, therefore, contains corporeal human particles, giving a whole new perspective to thoughts about the substantiality of breath. Dickens's attention, in *The Uncommercial Traveller,* is on the way that people eventually come to be dust, and are then breathed in by the living. However, as the nineteenth century progressed, a debate was also raging about how quickly people should come to dust, and how immediately it was appropriate to become part of the breathed atmosphere.

Cremation

The cremation controversy of the late nineteenth century began in earnest in 1873 and continued for the rest of the century, but it had been developing before that. As the population expanded, and was particularly (and increasingly) focused in urban areas, so concerns grew about how best to deal with the mounting numbers of dead, and, correspondingly, how to ensure that conditions for the living remained sanitary. Connor explains that,

> In the first three decades of the nineteenth century the British population increased by more than 50 per cent, with most of the increases in towns. The resulting overcrowding affected not just the living but also the dead. Intense concern grew during the 1840s about the dangers of disease and contamination posed by the many central London graveyards, and there was pressure to replace 'intramural interment' with burials in more outlying areas where the living need not be in such uncomfortable proximity with the dead.

In an attempt to combat this issue, the 'Magnificent Seven' (the large, outlying cemeteries of Tower Hamlets, Kensal Green, Highgate, Brompton, Nunhead, West Norwood, and Abney Park) were founded around London, but even these were not enough by the 1870s, when 'the explosive growth of the suburbs began to suggest to many that these extramural retreats were soon likely to find themselves again cheek by

jowl with areas of dense population.'[147] A radical solution was needed, and in 1873 Sir Henry Thompson published an essay on 'The Treatment of the Body after Death'.[148] The essay was only nine pages long, but was influential in debates that were, as Hamlin has put it, 'a largely literary conflict between two groups of body-disposal reformers, both of them objecting – on grounds of health, decency, harmony with nature, and wise land use – to an antiseptic embalming mentality'.[149] Thompson's main opponent in innovation was Sir Francis Seymour Haden, who argued for the employment of wicker caskets (as opposed to hard chests), as a way to ensure that bodies would decompose as quickly as possible.[150] Cremation, which Thompson argued for, was already common practice in other countries (Shelley, drowned in Italy in 1822, had memorably been 'cremated' on the beach at Viareggio, in line with sanitary laws of the time), and was finally legalised in England nearly thirty years after Thompson's essay, with the Cremation Act of 1902.[151]

In 'The Treatment of the Body after Death', Thompson describes what happens to a body after 'The last faint breath ha[s] been noted', and a person has, finally, died. In an extraordinary passage, which is worth quoting at length, he describes the reciprocal cycles of life and death that exist between all things on earth:

> If an animal be resolved into its ultimate constituents in a period, according to the circumstances, say, of four hours, of four months, of four years, or even of four thousand years – for it is impossible to deny that there may be instances of all these periods during which the process has continued – these elements which assume the gaseous form mingle at once with the atmosphere, and are taken up from it without delay by the ever open mouths of vegetable life. By a thousand pores in every leaf the carbonic acid which renders the atmosphere unfit for animal life is absorbed, the carbon being separated and assimilated to form the vegetable fibre, which, as wood, makes and furnishes our houses and ships, is burned for our warmth, or is stored up

[147] Connor, *The Matter of Air*, pp. 236-37.
[148] Henry Thompson, 'The Treatment of the Body after Death', *Contemporary Review*, 23 (1873), 319-28; Thompson's main role was as physician to Queen Victoria.
[149] Hamlin, p. 15.
[150] See Hamlin, p. 15.
[151] See Connor, *The Matter of Air*, pp. 230-82.

> under pressure for coal. All this carbon has played its part, 'and many parts,' in its time, as animal existences from monad up to man. Our mahogany of to-day has been many negroes in its turn, and before the African existed was integral portions of many a generation of extinct species. And when the table which has borne so well some twenty thousand dinners, shall be broken up from pure debility and consigned to the fire; thence it will issue into the atmosphere once more as carbonic acid, again to be devoured by the nearest troop of hungry vegetables, green peas or cabbages in a London market garden – say, to be daintily served on the table which now stands in that other table's place, and where they will speedily go on to the making of 'Lords of the Creation.' And so on, again and again, as long as the world lasts.
>
> Thus it is that an even balance is kept – demonstrable to the very last grain if we could only collect the data – between the total amounts of vegetable life existing together at any instant on our globe. There *must* be an unvarying relation between the decay of animal life and the food produced by that process for the elder twin, the vegetable world. Vegetables first, consumed by animals either directly or indirectly, as when they eat the flesh of animals who live on vegetables. Secondly, these animals daily casting off effete matters, and by decay after death providing the staple food for vegetation of every description. One the necessary complement of the other. The atmosphere, polluted by every animal whose breath is poison to every other animal, being every instant purified by plants, which taking out the deadly carbonic acid and assimilating carbon, restore to the air its oxygen, first necessary of animal existence.[152]

Writing a hundred years after Priestley's discoveries about oxygen, and about the way that plants and animals are poised in a continually reciprocal respiratory relationship, Thompson utilises Priestley's findings to support his argument for returning human bodies to the air as quickly as possible. He demonstrates that, after an animal has died and has disintegrated entirely 'into its ultimate constituents' over a period of time ('according to the circumstances') its 'elements […] assume the gaseous form[,] mingle at once with the atmosphere' and are then taken into 'the ever open mouths of vegetable life.' More specifically, he describes how these 'gaseous' elements are absorbed into the plants via 'a thousand pores in every leaf', as plants seem to breathe in the dead animal matter that has been assimilated into the air. 'Thus it is', Thompson states 'that an even balance is kept'. Plants and animals live in harmony with each other and the 'atmosphere, polluted by every animal whose breath is poison to every other

[152] Thompson, pp. 319; 320-21.

animal' is in 'every instant purified by plants' so as to render the air again healthy for animals to breathe.

Trying to convince people who worried that cremation may not be the right thing to do, particularly on religious grounds, Thompson turns from science to language and metaphor. 'Never', he writes, 'could the solemn and touching words "ashes to ashes, dust to dust," be more appropriately uttered than over a body about to be consigned to the furnace', and, furthermore, the 'dissipation of [the] body in the atmosphere in the ethereal form of gaseous matter is far more suggestive as a type of another and a brighter life, then the consignment of the body to the abhorred prison of the tomb'.[153] Cremation, Thompson argues, would return people physically to dust and air (which, of course, others will then breathe in), while at the same time offering a sort of spiritual return to a more heavenly idea of air.

Technological advances

Alongside the various examples of a heightened awareness of the significance of air that I have examined in this chapter thus far, were technological and engineering advances. Just as there were emerging machines that used breath to maintain life (bellows), or seemed to acquire life from breath (ventriloquists' dolls), so technologies sought to mimic and harness the life and energy-giving properties of the wind for greater engineering innovation.

Between 1825 and 1829, William Heath produced a series of prints entitled the *March of Intellect*, which satirised a plethora of 'modern' inventions and developments, including architecture and engineering transport. One of the *March of Intellect* pictures,

[153] Thompson, p. 327.

from 1828, is particularly concerned with air-related technological inventions, but with extraordinary elaborations.

Figure 3: William Heath, *The March of Intellect: Lord how this world improves as we grow older* (1828)

Across the top of the picture are written the words: 'Lord how this world improves as we grow older.' It is a busy picture, bustling with people, transport and architectural feats, and looking rather bizarre. The centre of the picture is taken up with a huge silver-grey tube with carriages running through it, and writing adorns the outside: 'Grand Vacuum Tube Company: Direct to Bengal'. People are getting into it with their luggage at one end (on 'Greenwich Hill') as a conductor asks, 'Now who's for Bengal [?]', and in the distance other people are being shot out of the far end of the tube into 'Bengal'. A middle section of the tube has been artistically cut away so as to show a group of the travellers within, all sitting on a sort of flat carriage with small wheels, which is clearly whizzing them in the direction of Bengal. Much of the other action of the picture takes place in the sky. There is a great bat-like flying machine above the

Vacuum Tube, bound 'For New South Wales' and full of 'convicts', while to the left of the picture is a canon firing figures into the sky: a 'Quick conveyance for the Irish Emigrants'. Between the convict-airship-bat, and the air-bound Irish Emigrants is what seems to be a great flying lawn, held in the air by four large air balloons, on which various military figures are gathered around canons and other artillery. In the top left-hand corner is a sprawling castle built on clouds in the air, with a sign next to it saying, 'Scheme for the Payment of the National Debt'. Closer to the ground, but still in the air, is a flying postman, complete with a top hat and large green wings. Next to him, a small open carriage is propelled along on the ground by the use of a bellows, worked by a footman. In the lower middle portion of the picture, below 'Greenwich Hill,' a bulky, steam-propelled coach races along, advertising (on its awning) that it goes 'London to Bath in Six Hours.' Racing down a hill in the bottom right corner is a structure in the shape of a horse, on wheels: 'The Steam Horse Velocity.' Five people sit astride it, one in front of another, and billows of smoke emerge from its nostrils and from a large chimney at the back.

Although obviously intended to be ludicrous, many of the ideas in this picture do have a basis in genuine inventions from the preceding few decades. A notable inventor is George Medhurst, who suggested the use of compressed air for propulsion in a number of inventions, including the 'Aeolian' engine, an undeveloped idea to use compressed air for the propulsion of vehicles through large pipes, for which he obtained a patent in 1799.[154] In *On the Properties, Power, & Application of the Aeolian Engine, With a Plan and Particulars for carrying it into Execution, upon a Scale that will embrace all the principal Objects to which it can be applied with full effect*, Medhurst suggests harnessing the power of the wind for his invention, which he

[154] Prosser. R. B., rev. by Anita McConnell, 'Medhurst, George', in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <www.oxforddnb.com> [accessed 20 September 2018].

describes as the 'most powerful and universal mechanical agent in the hands of mankind, created and perpetually maintained by nature throughout all the countries upon earth, and is at hand in every part of the whole globe, without the smallest expence to mankind'; he states that his wind-powered engine 'will therefore constitute a perfect and complete substitute for the steam-engine, and all machinery actuated by fire'. Explaining in more detail how this would be able to happen, he asserts that, 'The PRINCIPLE of this invention is to employ the wind as a first mover, to condense the common air of the atmosphere into a vessel of sufficient strength and capacity; to which condensed air is then applied.'[155] This machine sounds not entirely unlike Heath's fantastical Vacuum Tube to Bengal, almost three decades later, although Medhurst's other ideas may also have had a part to play in Heath's satire.

In 1810, Medhurst imagined and wrote about *A New Method of Conveying Letters and Goods with Great Certainty and Rapidity by Air*: 'the extraordinary strength, levity, and elasticity of Air renders it capable of very high degrees of velocity by mechanical means, far greater than can be given to any other body passing through the atmosphere.' He suggests a 'light and hollow vessel' travelling through a tube, forced forward by the pressure exerted by air 'with the velocity of 150 feet in a second by the pressure of 9 ounces per square inch.' This, he says, would be capable of sending packets of letters at one hundred miles an hour. He suggests that this principle can also be scaled up 'to convey portable goods of great weight and magnitude' through a much larger tube with a 'four-wheeled carriage' running through it. However, he acknowledges that the running of this invention would require 'a steam engine, at

[155] George Medhurst, *On the Properties, Power, & Application of the Aeolian Engine, With a Plan and Particulars for carrying it into Execution, upon a Scale that will embrace all the principal Objects to which it can be applied with full effect* (London: William Burton, [n.d.]), pp. 4; 7.

the mouth of the tunnel, impelling the air through it.'[156] Seventeen years later, in 1827, Medhurst was still publishing ideas, this time *A New System of Inland Conveyance, for the Goods and Passengers, Capable of Being Applied and Extended Throughout the Country; and of Conveying all Kinds of Goods, Cattle, and Passengers, with the Velocity of Sixty Miles in an Hour, at an Expense that will not Exceed the One-Fourth Part of the Present Mode of Travelling, without the Aid of Horses or any Animal Power,* an idea which he claims to be 'founded upon the well-known and wonderful properties of common air – the most powerful and universal mechanical agent within the reach of mankind'.[157]

Turning back to Heath's *March of Intellect* print, it is possible to see how far his fantastical images were grounded in genuine inventions of the time, as possibilities for harnessing the air for technological advance were investigated. The Museum of London's caption of Heath's print states that the picture 'satirizes the social effects of steam power.' It then, however, turns to a specific form of steam power, the steamboat, advising that, 'Steamboats were faster and more reliable than sailing vessels.'[158] In fact, an early version of a steamboat had first been patented by John Allen in 1729, but it was not until 1783 that one was first successfully demonstrated to work.[159] This early experimental steamboat, the 'Pyroscaphe', was given its first voyage on the River Saône in France by the Marquis de Jouffrey d'Abbans, and carried several passengers

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[156] George Medhurst, *A New Method of Conveying Letters and Goods with Great Certainty and Rapidity by Air* (London: D. N. Shury, 1810), p. 5; 6; 7; 9; 11.
[157] George Medhurst, *A New System of Inland Conveyance, for the Goods and Passengers, Capable of Being Applied and Extended Throughout the Country; and of Conveying all Kinds of Goods, Cattle, and Passengers, with the Velocity of Sixty Miles in an Hour, at an Expense that will not Exceed the One-Fourth Part of the Present Mode of Travelling, without the Aid of Horses or any Animal Power* (London: T. Brettell, 1827), p. 3.
[158] 'The March of the Intellect' (image 0014520), *Museum of London Prints* <www.museumoflondonprints.com> [accessed 3 September 2018].
[159] Francis Jordan, *The Life of William Henry, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1729-1786: Patriot, Military Officer, Inventor of the Steamboat; a Contribution to Revolutionary History* (Lancaster, PA: Press of the New Era Printing Company, 1910), pp. 49-50.

later that month.[160] Other similar, successful models followed in 1785, and John Fitch of Philadelphia began to run a commercial service, carrying up to 30 passengers at a time on the Delaware River.[161] These projects were infrequent before the nineteenth century, but they rapidly gained in popularity in the initial decades of the century. Transatlantic voyages followed: in 1819 the *SS Savannah* travelled from North America to England using a combination of sails and steam, and, in the following decades, steam became more and more common at sea.[162]

As engineers innovated and developed their ideas, more efficient forms of travel (for both people and cargo) began to be imagined. Different versions of air, from steam to compressed air, were proposed as ways to circumvent the limits of the natural world. From the direction of the winds to the speed of horses, transport had long been bound to nature, and the scientific developments of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries started to suggest the possibility of a sort of independence from the rhythms and limits of the natural world.

*

The purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate the variety of air-related scientific experimentation and development in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (in particular), and also to establish some common threads that will run through this study. It is not the business of this thesis to trace each of these developments through cultural-historicist readings; however, some of the imaginative consequences of these advances and discoveries are found in the images, metaphors, and experiments with form of late eighteenth and nineteenth-century poetry. In the following chapters, I

[160] See B. E. G. Clark, *Steamboat Evolution*, 3rd edn ([n.p.]: Fogdog Books, 2010), p. 54.
[161] Jordan, pp. 49-50.
[162] Robert H. Thurston, *Robert Fulton: his Life and its Results* (New York: Dodd, Mead and company, 1891), pp. 168-69.

elucidate some of these consequences in the work of two prominent poets of this period: Coleridge and Tennyson.

CHAPTER 2

'Vital Breathings': Coleridge, airs, and cycles of inspiration

Writing to Humphry Davy on 25 July 1800, Coleridge included in his letter a description of his son, Hartley, at the time nearly four years old: 'Hartley is a spirit that dances on an aspin leaf – the air, which yonder sallow-faced & yawning Tourist is breathing, is to my Babe a perpetual Nitrous Oxyde. Never was more joyous creature born'.[1] This curious image recalls Coleridge's own experiences of taking (and watching others take) nitrous oxide at the Pneumatic Institution during the course of Davy's experiments the previous year, as subjects struggled to express the effect that inhaling this gas was having on their thoughts and feelings. But it also draws more broadly on notions of breathing that were increasingly prevalent at the turn of the century. Coleridge is articulating something about air and breath that was alive for him and his contemporaries, both in terms of the effect that breathing can have on the thoughts and inner life, and the effect that the inner life can have on the ability to breathe well, literally and metaphorically. His scientific, political and personal understanding of different 'airs' plays into his poetry, and I examine how he explores the ways that these 'airs' might affect thought and feeling when they are breathed into the body. Coleridge, I argue, writes about breathing as an interaction, a reciprocal engagement, between the self and the environment, and between the self and others. Breath is the conductor between the external atmosphere, which might consist of different 'airs' in various forms, and internal thought and feeling. The act of breathing in the surrounding air – whether that is rural, oxygenated air; stuffy, 'rebreathed' air; or artificially-produced gas such as nitrous oxide – affects one internally, in mind and body, as the outside is

[1] *CL*, I, 612.

brought in and the person is physically acted upon. Breathing out, then, affects the surrounding atmosphere, including other breathing beings in the vicinity. Different airs and breaths become part of a larger cycling and recycling of physiological and metaphorical, creative 'inspiration.' This chapter is therefore concerned with cycles, meeting points and exchanges of breath in Coleridge's writing.

Breath, thought, and feeling

Coleridge was writing at a time when breath and breathing were being closely examined, from Priestley's discoveries about 'different kinds of air', through Beddoes's and Davy's experiments with medicinal 'airs' and recreational gases, to socio-medical advice about the health of air in domestic and other living spaces. Coleridge was a frequent correspondent of Priestley's, and, as we have seen, also became involved in experiments at the Pneumatic Institution. His knowledge of gases and their effects on the body reached well beyond traditional metaphors and literary tropes. One of the most notable aspects of this aerated zeitgeist is the deep connection between thought and breath. Davy's self-experiments with nitrous oxide, also undertaken on subjects including Coleridge himself, memorably reveal the intense effects that breathing this specific 'air' (as opposed to atmospheric air) could have on the mind and experience. Coleridge found that he experienced a state 'of more unmingled pleasure than I had ever before experienced' when he breathed the gas.[2] The connection between what is breathed in and the way that it affects thought and experience even made its way into the asylum. As I have observed, James Tilly Matthews believed that his mind was being controlled by an 'Air Loom', and the complicated tortures he felt himself subjected to were all to do with different 'airs' being used to affect the thoughts and the

[2] Davy, *Researches*, p. 518.

mind. From Davy's poems and experiments to Matthews and others in the asylum, breathing could (or could seem to) change the way that people think, behave and feel.

It must be remembered that, particularly in the early years of Coleridge's writing life, science and poetry were closely aligned, and the boundaries between them were indistinct and shifting. Coleridge was deeply interested in the latest scientific developments: as well as reading and learning about them, he carried out his own experiments, which he describes in his notebooks. Reciprocally, Davy was involved in the proofs of *Lyrical Ballads* and also wrote poetry himself, while Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* was a detailed poetic engagement with contemporary science. By the turn of the century, poetry had become an established method for communicating about breath and the science of breathing. As well as his interactions with Davy, Coleridge had certainly read Darwin's *The Economy of Vegetation*, and was aware of Priestley's work with oxygen and of the symbiotic relationship between human and plant respiration. He corresponded with Priestley in 1794, although the major subject of their discussions was shared political ideals. Later, he was a keen audience member during Davy's chemistry lectures at the Royal Institution, in January 1802.[3]

In Coleridge's letter to Davy in 1800, 'Hartley is a spirit that dances on an aspin leaf'. This may seem to be a throwaway comment, a hyperbolic attempt to describe the vitality of childhood, and especially of this child, who is so frequently described in airy, spiritual, insubstantial terms (consider the 'limber Elf', the 'faery Thing' in the Conclusion to Part II of *Christabel* (656; 658), or the 'Faery Voyager' of Wordsworth's 'To H. C., Six Years Old', who floats 'In such clear water, that thy Boat | May rather

[3] At Davy's lectures Coleridge made elaborate notes about oxygen in what we now know as Notebook 8. He states: 'Oxygen Gas discovered by Priestly', and, after describing how to synthesise oxygen through the use of heat, notes: 'a still simpler mode of procuring Oxygen. The leaves of living Vegetables covered with dew & exposed to light – inclose plants in inverted Glasses, in Water' (*CN,* I, 1098)

seem | To brood on air than on an earthly stream' (5; 6-8)).[4] But the description is also a shorthand way of writing to Davy and creates a common image through a sense of shared knowledge and experience of the effects of nitrous oxide. Experimenting on himself the year before, Davy had noted that the nitrous oxide 'made me dance about the laboratory as a madman, and has kept my spirits in a glow ever since', almost as Coleridge observes Hartley doing a year later.[5] The image of little Hartley as 'a spirit that dances on an aspin leaf' as though breathing 'a perpetual Nitrous Oxyde' is one of absolute vitality. It is also an image of near insubstantiality, as though Hartley has become the gas itself, rather than being a physical body with lungs that expand to take the gas into that body (a reminder of Davy's assertion that 'nothing exists, but Thought'?). 'A spirit that dances on an aspin leaf' is an image as light as possible. Aspen leaves are known for being extremely sensitive and mobile, and the scientific name of the Eurasian Aspen – 'Populus Tremula' – describes the way that they tremble in the slightest breeze, seeming almost to make the air itself visible, or to blend into the air themselves.[6] This image recalls Coleridge's 'The Nightingale: a Conversation Poem' (written in 1798), which ends with a focus on baby Hartley, enthralled by the moon. Yet, in this letter in 1800, Hartley seems more like the elusive nightingale himself, who is seen to:

> perch giddily
> On blosmy twig still swinging from the breeze,
> And to that motion tune his wanton song
> Like tipsy joy that reels with tossing head. (83-86)

Like the 'tipsy joy' of the nightingale, Hartley's very vitality similarly seems like it must have been artificially heightened to the point of being abstract and difficult to pin

[4] William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 100.
[5] Quoted in John Ayron Paris, *The Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), I, 56.
[6] 'aspen', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 16 June 2016].

down, recalling the heightened physical sensations and giddy mental states brought on by breathing artificial airs such as nitrous oxide. However, he actually requires no artificial stimulus; unlike the tourist (and, implicitly, all adults), his joy is natural to him.

Coleridge's poetry again and again brings up the idea of an interplay between the internal and the external, and particularly the relationship between breath and thought. In 'The Eolian Harp,' which was originally written in 1795, and published in 1796 as 'Effusion xxxv', Coleridge describes explicit links between external breezes and thoughts. This focus initially appears through sound, and the lack of it. We begin, Coleridge writes, in a 'world so hushed' that the 'stilly murmur of the distant Sea | Tells us of Silence', before, in the next stanza, the sound of the wind playing on 'that simplest Lute' begins to make itself heard in the poem (10-12). The sound of the harp gets louder as the 'strings' are 'Boldlier swept' by the wind (17; 18). This, then, becomes the moment in which Coleridge makes the link between wind and thoughts:

> And thus, my love! As on the midway slope
> Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
> Whilst through my half-closed eye-lids I behold
> The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
> And tranquil muse upon tranquillity;
> Full many a thought uncalled and undetained,
> And many idle flitting phantasies,
> Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
> As wild and various as the random gales
> That swell and flutter on this subject lute! (34-43)

Coleridge likens his thoughts to the breeze that plays the harp. His thoughts in this moment of 'tranquillity' are 'uncalled and undetained', '[t]ravers[ing]' his brain momentarily and then 'flitting' off again, 'As wild and various as the random gales | That swell and flutter on this subject lute!' Describing his brain as 'indolent and passive', he suggests both extreme relaxation but also, more importantly, that his brain is receptive, or ready to be acted upon by the thoughts and 'idle flitting phantasies'.

Yet, although there is a clear literary connection between the external breeze and the internal thoughts through the likeness of their actions, Coleridge does not make this explicit in the way that Wordsworth would in the 1805 *Prelude*, where the poet feels a 'gentle breeze | [….] beat against [his] cheek' (I. 1-3). In 'The Eolian Harp', the breeze that plays upon the harp must also have been playing upon Coleridge's skin, but this tangible possibility is left to the reader's imagination.

In 'Frost at Midnight' (1798) Coleridge similarly begins in a 'calm', windless world, which offers him a sense of 'that solitude, which suits | Abstruser musings':

> 'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
> And vexes meditation with a strange
> And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
> This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,
> With all the numberless goings on of life,
> Inaudible as dreams! (5-13)

However, the 'strange | And extreme silentness' is actually distracting: it is 'so calm, that it disturbs | And vexes meditation'. Instead of the silence itself it is the tiny motion of the 'film, which fluttered on the grate' and which 'Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing', that prompts memories for Coleridge of his school days and of his past thoughts and hopes (15; 16). It is, structurally, over halfway before Coleridge turns to the sound of Hartley's breath, reminding the reader that this sound has, in fact, been going on for the entirety of the poem. Once he has turned to it, he memorably discusses this breathing, and its strange interplay with his own thoughts:

> Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,
> Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,
> Fill up the interspersed vacancies
> And momentary pauses of the thought! (44-47)

Hartley's breath here mingles with Coleridge's thought; or rather, it does not quite mingle, but takes turns with it. In any pause of thought is heard the baby's breathing, which is the proof of Hartley's living reality. This is like a conversation between

Coleridge and his sleeping child, but a strange conversation of thought and breath. What happens next though, is particularly revealing in terms of the relationship between breathing, thoughts and external airs. As in 'The Eolian Harp,' where it was implicitly the sense of the wind on the lute that affected Coleridge's thought process, in 'Frost at Midnight,' baby Hartley's breathing and its interplay with Coleridge's thoughts precipitates further thoughts about the air itself that is acting upon them both. Having meditated upon the child, who is breathing next to him by the fire in this little cottage front room, and on his own childhood in a prison-like city school, he turns his attention to Hartley's hoped-for future in the fresh air and the open, rural countryside. This choice, I will go on to suggest, is related to his increasing understanding of how breathing in different 'airs' (in particular, oxygen) can affect one's inner feelings and experience.

Green plants and common air

It was in the years following advances in understanding concerning oxygen and the role of plants in renewing rebreathed air that Wordsworth wrote and revised the *Prelude*. With this in mind, I suggest that the 'green fields' of Wordsworth's opening lines are not just verdant with the promise of a new and different life, but are also full of the life-giving properties of oxygen (I. 2). The 'blessing in this gentle breeze' may well be physiological as well as psychological; the poet is starting to breathe in reciprocity with this great natural world as he ventures into it (I. 1). The poet's joy at having been from 'yon City's walls set free', to a place where the air is fresh and 'blows from the green fields' is a familiar trope in Romantic literature, but takes on new meaning in the *Prelude* when one considers the growing understanding about the effects of oxygen and the importance of healthy breathing (I. 7; I. 2). Furthermore, the political connotations

of ‘common air’ (as James Thomson put it in 1726) cannot be ignored, especially in the context of Coleridge’s early exchanges with Priestley.[7] ‘Common air’ is a phrase that functioned, like ‘common land’, to indicate that it is a right of all people. Wordsworth’s lexis of an escape from the confinement of city life to the fresh, free air of the countryside recalls concerns addressed in prison reform literature, which focused on the insalubrious air in prisons.

John Howard’s *State of Prisons* sought to bring the condition of prisons at the time to the attention of the authorities and the public, and to suggest improvements to their construction and management. One of his notable recommendations is the necessity for the ‘“free admission” of fresh, cooling air, and his proposed improvements center on constructing and managing prisons so as to ensure adequate air circulation’.[8] Howard states that prisoners are being ‘robbed’ of air, making explicit the sense of being cut off from something that should be a natural right of every person.[9] Cervantes and Porter ‘trace the familiar tropes of Romantic-era prison literature’ by Howard and the poets that he influenced directly, to poets including Wordsworth and Coleridge (whom he influenced indirectly).[10]

As in the *Prelude*, in Coleridge’s writing there are multiple references to a sense of freedom in comparison with the memory of being imprisoned in a city. In a notebook entry in 1802, Coleridge writes, ‘the first sight of green fields with the numberless nodding gold cups, & the winding River with alder on its bank affected me, coming out of a city confinement, with the sweetness & power of a sudden strain of Music’, while

[7] *James Thomson: The Seasons*, ed. by James Sambrook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 219; Coburn also notes that John Livingstone Lowes (in *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination*) connected Coleridge’s reading of Darwin’s *Botanic Garden* with his reading of Thomson’s *Seasons,* and states that Coleridge was certainly ‘reading Thomson in January 1795’, shortly before he first met Wordsworth (*CN*, I, Notes, 9).
[8] Cervantes and Porter, p. 100.
[9] Quoted in Cervantes and Porter, pp. 104-5.
[10] Cervantes and Porter, pp. 97-8.

in ‘A Letter to ----’ (written earlier in the same year) he remembers a childhood at school in London: ‘far-cloistered in a city school, | The sky was all I knew of beautiful’.[11] In ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’, he imagines what the ramble ‘Beneath the wide wide Heaven’ might be like for Charles Lamb who has been, in Coleridge’s perception, ‘hunger[ing] after Nature, many a year | In the great City pent’ (21; 29-30). In Coleridge’s hands, the Romantic trope of imprisonment is especially marked by the contrast of confinement with access to fresh air.

Not to be confined was also, for Coleridge, to create different possibilities for the breathing body. In ‘Frost at Midnight,’ Coleridge compares his own childhood, defined by the prisonlike city, to the future one he imagines for Hartley:

> My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart
> With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,
> And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,
> And in far other scenes! For I was reared
> In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,
> And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
> But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
> By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
> Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
> Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
> And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
> The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
> Of that eternal language[.] (48-60)

Liberated in Coleridge’s mind from the oppressiveness of the (potential) city, Hartley will be brought up in the healthy, free air, becoming like the wild breeze himself with the breathing of it. By breathing healthy air, Hartley will partake of the right to ‘common air’, and will be free to breathe it in a more expansive way. The moment foreshadows the insubstantial ‘spirit’ of the letter to Davy. There is also a sense that the future Hartley ‘wander[s] like a breeze’ in this poem because he is still imagined, not quite real to Coleridge – part of an insubstantial, potential future that the poet cannot

[11] *CN*, I, 1256; *CL,* II, 791.

quite bring himself to substantiate. Hartley, in Coleridge's description in his letter to Davy in 1800, seems able to experience the air in a different and more intense way to the 'tourist[s]' around him; he is himself a 'spirit', and he seems to create his own location: he 'dances on an aspin leaf'. The 'sallow-faced & yawning Tourist' is in complete contrast with him: tired, sickly, and almost devoid of life.[12] Although apparently breathing the same air as Hartley, the 'tourist' is affected in a completely different way; the air itself can seem to have a different effect depending on how the breather is feeling at the time, on how receptive the breather is. Furthermore, Coleridge may also be implying something about the levels of oxygen that Hartley and the tourist have each been exposed to. Both Coleridge and Davy were aware that the tourist, probably coming from the city, lacked a sustained healthy intake of oxygenated air, while Hartley, brought up in the country, has been breathing freely of the fresh air there.

Coleridge's vision for Hartley in 'Frost at Midnight' was memorable, and the particular associations and images within the poem became a source of other poetic ways of thinking about Hartley throughout his life. In 'To H. C., Six Years Old', Wordsworth implies a connection between thoughts and breezes in relation to Hartley, thus recalling both Coleridge's focus on thought and breath in his poem, and his hope for Hartley's future life and learning in nature:

> O thou! whose fancies from afar are brought;
> Who of thy words dost make a mock apparel,
> And fittest to unutterable thought
> The breeze-like motion and the self-born carol. (1-4)

However, Wordsworth continues in a more cautionary vein:

[12] Carl Thompson points out that although the term 'tourist' in this period 'begins to take on the pejorative aspect that it still bears today, and "tourism" becomes understood as a set of travel practices that are both a dubious consequence of modernity and the means by which modernity contaminates pristine cultures and environments', the word was 'only *beginning* to acquire this derogatory connotation' (Carl Thompson, 'Travel Writing', in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. Nicholas Roe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 555-73 (p. 560)).

> Thou art so exquisitely wild,
> I think of thee with many fears
> For what may be thy lot in future years. (12-14) [13]

Unlike the idyllic future that Coleridge images for Hartley, in which he 'wander[s] like a breeze' and learns from nature, Wordsworth worries that Hartley is too much like the 'wild' breeze. In 1833 the adult Hartley, who had struggled to settle in life, offered his own poetic response to 'Frost at Midnight' in his 'Dedicatory Sonnet to S. T. Coleridge,' which is the introductory poem to his 1833 *Poems*:

> The prayer was heard: I 'wander'd like a breeze,'
> By mountain brooks and solitary meres,
> And gather'd there the shapes and phantasies
> Which, mixt with passions of my sadder years,
> Compose this book.

In the notes to his poems, Hartley Coleridge wrote in relation to 'Frost at Midnight' that, 'As far as regards the *habitats* of my childhood, these lines, written at Nether Stowey, were almost prophetic. But poets are *not* prophets.'[14] He might, understandably, have been resistant to the idea of poetry influencing the future, and the fulfilled prayer for a childhood shaped by inspirational, rural air was not necessarily a blessing.

We might also question how fresh the air would have been in that small downstairs cottage room in 'Frost at Midnight.' The poem is set during the winter, in a room in which a now 'low-burnt fire' has been burning all day, where Coleridge has been breathing (and probably Sara too, as well as baby Hartley), and which was unlikely to have been well ventilated (14). As discussed in Chapter 1, although recommendations for the ventilation of houses became increasingly popular in the late eighteenth century, those who were less affluent would have been more concerned with keeping warm in winter than in keeping the house well ventilated. Although not poor,

[13] Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes*, p. 100.
[14] Hartley Coleridge, *Poems by Hartley Coleridge* (Leeds: F. E. Bingley, 1833), p. 145.

the Coleridge household in February 1798 was only just emerging from feeling itself to be crippled by financial constraints, because of the welcome addition of the annuity from Tom and Josiah Wedgwood, which had been granted to Coleridge in mid-January.[15] It is likely that the household would have done all it could to avoid draughts. Furthermore, on this particular night, it is completely windless ('The Frost performs its secret ministry, | Unhelped by any wind'), and Coleridge goes out of his way to emphasise how 'calm' the night is, 'so calm, that it disturbs | And vexes meditation with a strange | And extreme silentness' (1-2; 8-10). Coleridge is intensely aware of the sound of the 'gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm', which moves him to wish that the child doing the breathing will grow up breathing rural, outdoor air as opposed to city air (45). However, if we turn to 'The Nightingale', written just two months later, we can see that Coleridge was already thinking not just about the city as a place of confinement, but even more particularly of confined indoor spaces.

In 'The Nightingale' Coleridge refers specifically to crowded, public indoor spaces. Addressing Wordsworth, he laments:

> And youths and maidens most poetical,
> Who lose the deep'ning twilights of the spring
> In ball-rooms and hot theatres, they still
> Full of meek sympathy must heave their sighs
> O'er Philomela's pity-pleading strains.
>
> My Friend, and thou, our Sister! we have learnt
> A different lore: we may not thus profane
> Nature's sweet voices, always full of love
> And joyance! (35-43)

This 'different lore' (like the 'far other lore' that Hartley will learn as he grows up like a 'breeze' in the countryside) includes the decision to reside away from town and city (or, as he has it in 'Frost at Midnight', 'in far other scenes'), and to escape crowded,

[15] See Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), pp. 174-82.

confined rooms. ‘The Nightingale’ is partly about moving away from the collective ‘sighs’ of this more stifled indoor breathing in ‘ball-rooms and hot theatres’, and harnesses contemporary socio-medical concerns about stuffy rebreathed air (as discussed in Chapter 1), which may also convey the stuffiness of social cliques. There is a sense, in ‘The Nightingale,’ of a whole nation or generation that is stifled and not able to breathe freely, both because they are unable to appreciate the value of the natural world, and also because they are stuck indoors. Coleridge, like William and Dorothy Wordsworth (‘my friend, and thou, our sister’), differs from these ‘youths and maidens’ in his refusal to ‘profane | Nature’s sweet voices’. Unlike much late eighteenth century medical writing, which tended to consider ‘changing the air’ of one’s immediate environment as the means of escaping from unhealthy air, in ‘The Nightingale’ Coleridge treats the decision to embrace fresh air elsewhere – in the country – as a positive choice instead. For Coleridge, the impulse to seek places of nature’s renewal (and not merely to renew the air in unnatural, urban surroundings) was informed by the science of ‘airs’ and experiments involving breathing with which he had become familiar. The science of breathing was shaping the Romantic poetic topoi of breezes and breathings. It is particularly apposite, then, that the mysterious ‘grove | Of large extent’, which is invoked in ‘The Nightingale’, is not just any natural place, but specifically one that has been reclaimed from the human by wild nature:

> This grove is wild with tangling underwood,
> And the trim walks are broken up, and grass,
> Thin grass and king-cups grow within the paths.
> But never elsewhere in one place I knew
> So many Nightingales (49-50; 52-6)

The statement, that Coleridge and William and Dorothy Wordsworth ‘have learnt | A different lore’, implies an attention to what can be learnt from ‘wild’ nature, and is reminiscent of the imagined future-Hartley in ‘Frost at Midnight,’ who will ‘wander

like a breeze' and learn 'far other lore | And in far other scenes'. The assertion that 'we have learnt | A different lore' in 'The Nightingale' might also, however, imply an element of comprehension of contemporary air-related issues on the part of Coleridge (and the Wordsworths). His correspondence with Priestley, and his reading of both Priestley and Darwin, as well as his interactions with other prominent figures in pneumatic chemistry, such as Davy and Beddoes, had taught him something of the new discoveries about how breathing different airs might interact with and affect human thought and experience, and the relationship that living, green plants have with the wider atmosphere, as well as with the people and animals that breathe the resulting atmospheric air.

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge return frequently to these ideas in their writing. In 'Lines Written in Early Spring,' published in *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, Wordsworth describes himself reclining 'in a grove […] | In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts | Bring sad thoughts to the mind' (2-4).[16] Despite his 'sad thoughts', he notices around him the way that all nature seems to live in harmony and appears to enjoy being alive: 'And 'tis my faith that every flower | Enjoys the air it breathes' (11-12). The way that the personified plants also 'breathe' the air may owe something to recent understandings about the symbiotic relationship of human and plant respiration. In a passage written some years later, in *The Statesman's Manual* (1816), Coleridge narrates himself gazing out of the window, having sat down to write – and he considers in particular his sense of breathing in harmony with the natural world:

> I feel an awe [....] I feel it alike, whether I contemplate a single tree or flower, or meditate on vegetation throughout the world, as one of the great organs of the life of nature. Lo! – with the rising sun it commences its outward life and

[16] William Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads*, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. by James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); Butler and Green note that Wordsworth 'had borrowed Erasmus Darwin's *Zoönomia, or the Laws of Organic Life* from Cottle in early March 1798' and 'in that book Darwin "attributes to vegetable life not merely sensibility, but some degree of voluntary power and even conscious thought"' (pp. 349-50).

> enters into open communion with all the elements, at once assimilating them to itself and to each other. At the same moment it strikes its roots and unfolds its leaves, absorbs and respires, steams forth its cooling vapour and finer fragrance, and breathes a repairing spirit, at once the food and tone of the atmosphere, into the atmosphere that feeds *it*.[17]

This passage is replete with images of renewal and respiration, which stem from Coleridge's fascination with the latest scientific discoveries about breathing. The passage could easily be read as primarily theological, and indeed much of the language has a Biblical ring to it ('Lo!', 'communion', 'repairing spirit'), but it is also about recent scientific discoveries to do with breathing, air, and the interdependency of all beings and organisms in the world. Coleridge describes himself contemplating both 'A single tree or flower', or 'vegetation throughout the world', as 'one of the great organs of the life of nature', thus suggesting that nature is one great whole, of which vegetation makes up an important and vital part. He then begins an astonishing description of the moment in which photosynthesis happens, as 'with the rising sun it commences its outward life', and explains in detail the ways that vegetation is linked to the rest of the world through breath and air. When the sun hits a plant, he says, it 'enters into open communion with all the elements'. Coleridge is here, I suggest, purposely evoking the many connotations of the term 'communion,' including the sense of a spiritual or religious community, a more general idea of fellowship or mutual association, as well as communication or interaction.[18] These varied senses might suggest something active, as though the plants have agency and are choosing to reach towards and communicate with the elements, but also the sense that they are participating in mutual interaction with each other and thus creating a sort of fellowship that attains a quasi-spiritual importance. Coleridge makes these multiple senses clear as he goes on to say that the vegetation is 'at once assimilating [the elements] to itself and

[17] *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Lay Sermons*, ed. by R. J. White (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 72.
[18] 'communion, n.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 19 August 2018].

to each other'. This is not all that is happening though, and Coleridge imagines the vegetation to be literally breathing in and out: 'At the same moment', he writes, the plant 'unfolds its leaves, absorbs and respires'. Furthermore, it then 'breathes a repairing spirit, at once the food and tone of the atmosphere, into the atmosphere that feeds *it*.' From the plant arises the breath of life that helps to mend what is around it, which also feeds the atmosphere, and helps to create it, to provide its 'tone'. Finally, the circle is completed. The atmosphere into which the plant is breathing its 'repairing spirit' is what is also, at the same time, 'feed[ing]' the plant itself with its own air. Coleridge here writes about inspiration in a way that is carefully grounded in scientific understanding. New appreciations about respiration and the reinvigorating relationship between the human and plant world were themselves providing freshly transformed inspiration for poetic engagement with the natural world.

Vicarious, cyclical inspiration in 'To William Wordsworth'

Written in January 1807 in response to hearing Wordsworth recite the latest version of what we now know as the *Prelude* over a series of evenings at Coleorton, 'To William Wordsworth, Composed on the Night after his Recitation of a Poem on the Growth of an Individual Mind' describes the effect of Wordsworth's words and voice upon the listening Coleridge. This poem attends both to Wordsworth's inspiration, in all its compound forms, and to his performance of the poem, as well as the effect of these upon Coleridge. I have already suggested that the 'gentle breeze' in the *Prelude*, may well bring physiological as well as psychological renewal; Wordsworth's inspiration in the opening lines of the *Prelude* is both physical and poetic (I. 1). It is the *Prelude*, which begins with such a memorable moment of inspiration, that Wordsworth read aloud to Coleridge over a number of evenings, and which became the catalyst for

Coleridge's own poem. The focus of 'To William Wordsworth,' then, becomes a continuing cycle of inspiration (and exhalation): Wordsworth is inspired; he speaks aloud the fruits of this inspiration to the listening Coleridge, who is in turn inspired both by the words of the *Prelude* (a poem that has sprung from Wordsworth's original inspiration) and by the way that Wordsworth speaks these words. Coleridge then writes this poem ('To William Wordsworth'), which, he presumably hopes, will go on to inspire other readers. This cycle of poetic inspiration and exhalation mirrors the literal inspiration and exhalation of the speaking Wordsworth (as well as that of the listening Coleridge).

The poem itself seems to embody a sense of these cycles of breathing through Coleridge's iterative use of language over successive lines. There are numerous examples, some of which are an exact repetition of a word, while others are a repetition of the same root word in a different form. At the beginning of the poem, for example, the lines, 'Into my heart have I received that Lay | More than historic, that prophetic Lay', offer an exact repetition of the same word ('Lay'), but transformed and imbued with greater sense by the rest of the phrase (2-3). It is as though the 'Lay', breathed in, is then transformed into something 'more than historic' and 'prophetic' to be released back into the world. Near the end of the poem, the exact repetition of the word 'conscious' again suggests a change through the placing of its repetition in the sentence, when Coleridge declares himself to be 'Scarce conscious, and yet conscious of its close' (108). Other examples show a transformation of the word itself: 'thou hast dared to tell | What may be told', or 'Strong in thyself, and powerful to give strength!', again suggesting a cyclical moving forward, as the senses build upon previous versions of themselves (6-7; 103). Structurally near the middle of the poem, Coleridge in fact embeds one repetition within another in an antimetabole: 'And Fears self-willed, that

shunned the eye of Hope; | And Hope that scarce would know itself from Fear' (67-68). His phrase offers a sense of a crescendo (inhalation) through line 67, from 'Fears' to 'Hope', and then a diminuendo (exhalation) from 'Hope' back to 'Fear' again, through line 68. These verbal repetitions throughout the poem seem to suggest a turning point between breathing in and breathing out, reflecting and emphasising the cycles of poetic and physiological inspiration.

Coleridge himself was, in fact, already deeply incorporated into the fabric of the *Prelude*. Wordsworth repeatedly referred to it as the 'poem to Coleridge', and Coleridge is addressed directly throughout, most memorably in Book X:

> Thus, O Friend!
> Through times of honour, and through times of shame,
> Have I descended, tracing faithfully
> The workings of a youthful mind, beneath
> The breath of great events, its hopes no less
> Than universal, and its boundless love;
> A Story destined for thy ear. (X. 940-46)[19]

Wordsworth speaks directly to his 'Friend', and describes the process by which he has created the 'Story destined for thy ear'; this was intended as a poem to be spoken out loud to Coleridge, rather than read silently by him. Furthermore, he describes the influence of the 'breath of great events' on the 'workings of a youthful mind'. This breath, which has shaped Wordsworth's developing mind, becomes, by the end of Book X, an outward breeze, which, he hopes, may have its own positive effect upon Coleridge:

> But indignation works where hope is not
> And thou, O Friend! wilt be refresh'd. There is
> One great Society alone on earth,
> The noble Living, and the noble Dead:
> Thy consolation shall be there, and Time
> And Nature shall before thee spread in store
> Imperishable thoughts, the place itself
> Be conscious of thy presence, and the dull

[19] See *CP*, p. 815.

Sirocco air of its degeneracy
Turn as thou mov'st into a healthful breeze
To cherish and invigorate thy frame. (X. 966-76)

The contrast between these two different kinds of air – the 'dull | Sirocco air of its degeneracy' and the 'healthful breeze' which will 'cherish and invigorate' Coleridge – is stark. It is through Coleridge's very 'presence' that Wordsworth imagines the air changing from unhealthy to healthy ('the place itself | Be conscious of thy presence'; 'Turn as thou mov'st'), yet it is also this newly healthy air which he imagines to be able to renew Coleridge himself, who would be directly affected by this 'healthful breeze'. In Wordsworth's poetic imagination, then, Coleridge is already in a reciprocal cycle of healing with the air itself.

Yet, although Wordsworth was clearly keen to read his 'poem to Coleridge' to his friend, and Coleridge was deeply impressed by it, Lucy Newlyn reminds us that, 'there can be no doubt that [Coleridge's] admiration for *The Prelude* is qualified by bitterness'.[20] Newlyn, in *Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Language of Allusion,* focuses specifically on the pain and jealousy that Coleridge was experiencing by this problematic point in their relationship. Wordsworth's life seemed settled, his work on an upward trajectory, while Coleridge was in personal turmoil and was struggling to complete anything. Coleridge's jealousies of Wordsworth had memorably come to a head shortly before the reading of the *Prelude* in late December 1806, when he saw, or imagined he saw, a clandestine liaison between Wordsworth and Sara Hutchinson (Wordsworth's sister-in-law, with whom Coleridge was hopelessly in love). As Coburn states, 'Whatever happened […] fostered Coleridge's jealous fears of SH's intimacy

[20] Lucy Newlyn, *Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Language of Allusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 195; for further discussion of the poetic relationship between Coleridge and Wordsworth, see: Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Gene Ruoff, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: the Making of the Major Lyrics, 1802–1804* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Paul Magnuson, *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

with WW'.[21] Notwithstanding the specifics of this event, Coleridge certainly felt, listening to Wordsworth recite the *Prelude*, that his own life and work were failures in comparison, and Newlyn suggests that 'it is *Prelude* Book Ten that gives Coleridge his sharpest sense of pain'.[22] 'To William Wordsworth' (and the version of the *Prelude* to which it responds) is certainly a poem that captures the problematic relationship between the two poets, but I suggest that Coleridge's illustrations of reciprocal breathing also attempt to express that there remains something above these immediate difficulties. This is a meeting of bodies and creative imagination, not just of personal jealousies and relationships. However, by the 1850 *Prelude* both the 'breath of great events' and the 'healthful breeze', which might 'cherish and invigorate' Coleridge's 'frame' (quoted above in the passages from Book X) are removed.[23] By that point (after years of mutual bitterness, and long after Coleridge's death), this reinvigorating possibility of inspiration is no longer there.

The first stanza of 'To William Wordsworth' establishes the relationship between thought and breath in this poem, and also the relationship between the speaking Wordsworth and the listening Coleridge.

> Friend of the Wise! and Teacher of the Good!
> Into my heart have I received that Lay
> More than historic, that prophetic Lay
> Wherein (high theme by thee first sung aright)
> Of the foundations and the building up
> Of a Human Spirit thou hast dared to tell
> What may be told, to the understanding mind
> Revealable; and what within the mind
> By vital Breathings secret as the soul
> Of vernal growth, oft quickens in the Heart
> Thoughts all too deep for words! (1-11)

[21] *CN*, II, Notes, 2975.
[22] Newlyn, p. 198.
[23] See William Wordsworth, *The Fourteen-Book Prelude*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

Wordsworth has ‘dared to tell | What may be told’, but Coleridge is at pains to point out that this ‘prophetic Lay’ is only ‘Revealable’ to ‘the understanding mind’. Coleridge is aware of a link between thoughts and breath, as we have seen in ‘Frost at Midnight’ or in the letter to Davy (about little Hartley seeming like ‘a spirit that dances on an aspin leaf’), where the mind must be open to receive inspiration.[24] Coleridge’s mind is clearly open in ‘To William Wordsworth’. He implies that he is especially receptive to Wordsworth’s inspirational words and speech: he can listen properly, with his whole body (‘Into my heart have I received that Lay’) and is able to be a wholly receptive audience. By listening fully and openly, he himself is able to be inspired.

Coleridge begins by addressing the internal workings of Wordsworth’s ‘mind’, which he imagines as the seed of inspiration. It is only through ‘vital Breathings’ that thoughts are ‘quicken[ed] in the Heart’, and become ‘all too deep for words’ (an allusion to Wordsworth’s own ‘Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears’, the final line of ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’).[25] The ‘vital Breathings’ bring to life the very deepest thoughts; they are not linked directly to articulation or to words, but are both ‘secret’ and affect what is hidden ‘within the mind’. There are ideas breathing within Wordsworth’s mind, which he will then breathe out, articulated in the words of the poem. These are the workings of inspiration, which give life to ideas, and take root and grow, spring-like. The lexical choice of the plural ‘Breathing*s*’ suggests both an ongoing cycle of inhalation and exhalation and a compound sense of different kinds of breathing: physical and metaphorical. Moments of inspiration, which are nurtured in the mind and are to become the poem, then go on to inspire Coleridge to write his own poem. Morton D. Paley points out that ‘Breathings’ appears only one other time in Coleridge’s poetic

[24] *CL*, I, 612.
[25] Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes*, p. 277.

output (baby Hartley's 'gentle breathings' in 'Frost at Midnight'), and suggests that, in using this word, Coleridge 'was aware that words associated with breath are a staple of Wordsworth's poetic vocabulary'. Paley suggests that this is one of many techniques in the poem by which Coleridge seeks to be 'celebrating Wordsworth's accomplishment and denigrating his own.'[26] This verbal link to 'Frost at Midnight' also, however, re-establishes a link between thought and breath, as well as recalling a moment in which the future (Hartley's imagined future in which he may freely 'wander like a breeze') seemed uncomplicated and brimming with possibility. At this early stage in 'To William Wordsworth', Wordsworth's thoughts are still 'too deep for words', still buried within the body, waiting to develop into an exhalation of poetry. This is still the moment after the in-breath; the life-giving properties of oxygen are flowing through the body, but the out-breath has not yet begun. I will address the complicated relationship between thoughts and the ability accurately to describe them through words in more detail in Chapter 3, when I focus in part on Coleridge's difficulties with articulating the inner workings of his mind and heart at certain periods of excessive emotion.

From the fourth stanza of 'To William Wordsworth' until the end of the poem, the focus is on the moment after Wordsworth has finished reciting the *Prelude*, and the effect that both the recitation and its ending have on Coleridge:

> O great Bard!
> Ere yet that last strain dying awed the air,
> With steadfast eye I viewed thee in the choir
> Of ever-enduring men. The truly Great
> Have all one age, and from one visible space
> Shed influence! They, both in power and act,
> Are permanent, and Time is not with *them*,
> Save as it worketh *for* them, not *in* it. (47-54)

Wordsworth's voice, speaking his poem, changes the very air and leaves a seemingly audible silence. The air (in 'To William Wordsworth') is personified too – it has been

[26] Morton D. Paley, *Coleridge's Later Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 15-16.

'awed' by Wordsworth's poem and by his reading it aloud. The air itself has become part of this literal and poetic reciprocal process of inspiration. Wordsworth's own breath – the air moving from inside his body to mingle with the air outside, and articulated as words – has affected the air that it meets, in a parallel of the way that breathing in the air would usually affect the breather, both physically and psychologically. This, says Coleridge, is poetry that will endure (in Chapter 3 I explore the idea of words – and poetry specifically – enduring after the speaker or poet is no longer there, both through the memory of others, and on the very air into which that person had spoken). Wordsworth's words will live on:

> Nor less a sacred Roll, than those of old,
> And to be placed, as they, with gradual fame
> Among the Archives of Mankind, thy work
> Makes audible a linked lay of Truth,
> Of Truth profound a sweet continuous lay,
> Not learnt, but native, her own natural notes! (55-60)

Wordsworth seems to be acting as a mouthpiece for some great natural truth, articulating something that is already there. 'Not learnt', Coleridge says, but understood on a deeper level. Like the future Hartley in 'Frost at Midnight', or Coleridge, and William and Dorothy Wordsworth, in 'The Nightingale', Wordsworth is here shown to have been profoundly affected by the 'natural notes' of nature, and is able to articulate his experience and understanding in a way that makes it 'audible' also to others, even if they may not have been so sensitive to the voice of nature themselves.

Of course, the 'linked lay of Truth' is also made 'audible' to Coleridge because this is a performance of the poem – it is something that Coleridge can hear because Wordsworth is reciting aloud. Coleridge is affected both by the actual words of the poem, and by the way in which they are delivered. In 'To William Wordsworth' Coleridge writes of the *Prelude* specifically as a spoken poem, the effect of the words themselves mingling with the effect of the performance, and of Wordsworth's voice.

Today we read the *Prelude* as a printed text, yet Coleridge writes about sound, breath, and listening as being integral to its inspirational nature. The effect on Coleridge, listening to this performance from Wordsworth, is powerful:

> Ah! as I listened with a heart forlorn
> The pulses of my Being beat anew:
> And even as Life returns upon the Drowned,
> Life's joy rekindling roused a throng of Pains –
> Keen Pangs of Love, awakening as a babe
> Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart;
> And Fears self-willed, that shunned the eye of Hope;
> And Hope that scarce would know itself from Fear;
> Sense of past Youth, and Manhood come in vain,
> And Genius given, and knowledge won in vain;
> And all which I had culled in Wood-walks wild,
> And all which patient toil had reared, and all,
> Commune with thee had opened out – but Flowers
> Strewed on my corse, and borne upon my Bier,
> In the same Coffin, for the self-same Grave! (61-75)

Listening to Wordsworth makes the 'pulses of [Coleridge's] Being beat anew', and produces strong emotions. Coleridge describes this as a physical reawakening, or reanimating, which is reinforced by the following line ('even as Life returns upon the Drowned').

This is not an easy rebirth though. The feelings that are 'roused' in Coleridge are intense – 'keen Pangs of Love', 'an outcry in the heart', 'Fears', 'Hope', etc. – and with the sensation of having regained life comes the concern that life has been lost, or wasted, in the interim. Coleridge's recent troubled years (of his marriage breakdown, his hopeless love for Sara Hutchinson, and the death of one of his children), and his seeming inability to finish things that he had started, meant that this evidence of Wordsworth's poetic success – to match his apparent familial success – was cutting to Coleridge, even as he could appreciate the poetry itself. While sailing out to Malta in 1804, as his ship, the Speedwell, struggled to make headway in an adverse wind, Coleridge wrote:

> And what are 5 days' toiling to Windward just not to lose ground, to almost 5 years! Alas! alas! what have I been doing on the Great Voyage of Life since my Return from Germany [in 1799] but fretting upon the front of the Wind – well for me if I have indeed kept my ground even![27]

Instead of allowing the wind to inspire him, and to breathe his poetic ventures into being, as Wordsworth seemed to have managed to do, Coleridge here worries that he has been wasting such opportunities, or not creating them when he could have done. Yet, despite his own anxieties, his uncomfortable jealousy of Wordsworth, and the darkly self-elegiac motif in the final lines of the passage ('Flowers | Strewed on my corse'), the sense of reanimation is vital. Wordsworth is effectively breathing him back to life in this passage.

Coleridge demonstrates that both the words of the poem and the performance of them have a magical, supernatural quality, particularly in their effect on himself:

> Eve following eve,
> Dear tranquil time, when the sweet sense of Home
> Is sweetest! moments for their own sake hailed
> And more desired, more precious for thy song,
> In silence listening, like a devout child,
> My soul lay passive, by thy various strain
> Driven as in surges now beneath the stars,
> With momentary Stars of my own birth,
> Fair constellated Foam, still darting off
> Into the darkness; now a tranquil sea,
> Outspread and bright, yet swelling to the Moon. (91-101)

These words can shape the world, and Coleridge is 'passive' to them, he suggests. As Hartley is receptive to the air in a way that the 'sallow-faced & yawning Tourist' is not in Coleridge's letter to Davy, so Coleridge is open and receptive to Wordsworth's 'various strain'. Wordsworth's poetry, and his performance of it, is inspirational, but to be truly inspired (as Coleridge has been, to write this poem), one must, as Coleridge understands, be able and willing to receive. Coleridge's 'soul lay passive', ready to be 'Driven' to the places that this poetry has the power to drive it to. Wordsworth's poetry,

[27] *CN*, II, 2063.

his ‘various strain’, is like the wind; it is the driving force moving Coleridge’s ‘soul’, as well as his creative energy. Recalling the ‘random gales | That swell and flutter on this subject Lute’ and the analogous thoughts ‘uncalled and undetained’ that ‘flit’ over Coleridge’s ‘passive brain’ in ‘The Eolian Harp,’ Wordsworth’s poetry (in its metaphorical wind-like guise) has moved outside itself and is shaping the (imaginative) world. It is a moment that also evokes Part V of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, both in its imagery and in its lexis. When the dead bodies of the shipmates become inhabited by a ‘troop of spirits’, ‘sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths, | And from their bodies passed’, to fly around and then ‘dart’ up towards the sun, seeming to precipitate a chorus of sounds as the natural world, especially the birds, joins in (349; 352-53).[28] In recalling these significant scenes, Coleridge portrays Wordsworth’s poetry, and his performance of it, as inspirational.

In the final lines of ‘To William Wordsworth’, Coleridge gives a specific description of Wordsworth’s voice, the poem, and the impression that these leave upon him:

> And when – O Friend! my comforter and guide!
> Strong in thyself, and powerful to give strength! –
> Thy long sustained Song finally closed,
> And thy deep voice had ceased – yet thou thyself
> Wert still before my eyes, and round us both
> That happy vision of beloved Faces –
> Scarce conscious, and yet conscious of its close
> I sate, my being blended in one thought
> (Thought was it? or Aspiration? or Resolve?)
> Absorbed, yet hanging still upon the sound –
> And when I rose, I found myself in prayer. (102-12)

The impression that Wordsworth leaves by having spoken, and the impression that his poetry leaves by having been read aloud, outlasts the voice that spoke it (as Coleridge has suggested earlier in the poem that it will). Coleridge is left ‘Scarce conscious’, his

[28] Unless otherwise stated, when quoting from the *Ancient Mariner* I use the 1834 text in *CP*.

'being blended in one thought'. Yet, as soon as he has stated that his 'being' is 'blended in one thought' he questions whether or not this is, in fact, the best way of describing the experience. 'Thought was it?', he wonders, 'or Aspiration? or Resolve?' While the primary meaning of 'Aspiration' is ambition or hope, it can also mean, according to the OED, 'the action of breathing into,' or 'that which is breathed out', or (in the most contemporary sense) 'the action of breathing or drawing one's breath'.[29] Here Coleridge acknowledges the possibility that he has been inspired by Wordsworth's poetry, and by his delivery of it. He wonders if he remains in a trance-like space as he 'aspires' Wordsworth's poetry, or, simply, that he has been filled with Wordsworth's own 'Aspiration'. That his 'being' may also be thought of as being 'blended in one aspiration' suggests a creative and personal union with Wordsworth that he does not quite dare to state outright. 'Aspiration' must remain an alternative, a question, in parentheses.

Like 'Aspiration', 'Resolve' is too strong a word to lay open claim to at this particular moment. It is clear that Coleridge wants to live up to the 'Aspiration' that Wordsworth holds for him (suggested in Part X of the *Prelude*, that he will 'be refresh'd' and invigorated by a 'healthful breeze' (967; 975)). This may be an opportunity for Coleridge to put aside the bitterness that he feels, and the anxiety about his own lack of focus, and allow himself to be inspired by Wordsworth's hopes. The ambiguity of phrasing in the final line of 'To William Wordsworth' – 'And when I rose, I found myself in prayer' – allows this possibility. It is purposely unclear whether Coleridge is saying that he 'rose' and discovered in that moment that he was in the act of praying, or whether it is through prayer that he had managed to (re)discover himself, as Wordsworth, in the *Prelude,* had hoped he might. The spontaneity of the moment

[29] 'aspiration, n.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 29 August 2018].

recalls the great turning point in Part IV of the *Ancient Mariner*, when the mariner sees the water snakes as 'happy living things' and finds that 'A spring of love gushed from [his] heart, | And [he] blessed them unaware' (282; 284-85), or the sudden lifting of the 'Weight' from Coleridge's 'Breast' in 'A Letter to ----', when, impulsively, he 'spake with rash Despair' (78; 76). In this moment, at the end of 'To William Wordsworth,' Coleridge finds that Wordsworth has stirred something deep inside him, which may yet bring about change.

In the penultimate line, Coleridge is 'hanging still upon the sound', just as the sound hangs upon the air. Again, Wordsworth's voice is lingering on in the breath that has mingled with the air, and which still seems to be affecting that air. Wordsworth's internal 'vital Breathings' have become external by the end of 'To William Wordsworth,' yet they have gone on to have a striking effect on Coleridge internally, on Coleridge's thoughts and feelings. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge find themselves to be part of a continuous cycle of inspiration, of physical breath and of poetic conception. The 'gentle breeze' that 'welcome[d]' Wordsworth at the beginning of the *Prelude* caused him to 'breathe again', creating a 'vital breeze' within him, eventually leading to the creation of the *Prelude* (I. 1; 5; 19; 44). The presence of this 'gentle breeze' is then observed by Coleridge to have become 'vital Breathings', which, exhaled, 'awed the air', inspiring Coleridge's own poetic creation of 'To William Wordsworth'. Coleridge listens to Wordsworth speaking aloud the *Prelude* and then creates his own poem out of that experience. In Coleridge's poem, these two poets are part of a cycle – a complex human and poetic cycle – of inspiration.

Breaths and breezes in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

While on his way to a self-imposed exile in Malta in 1804, Coleridge found himself for a time floating on a strangely calm sea. He observed, on 27 April:

> Plenty of Bonitos leaping up / likewise Porpoises, a noise of rushing, like that of a Vessel dashing on by steam or other power within itself, thro' the Calm, & making the Billows {& the Breeze, which} it did not find / Ancient Mariner.[30]

Although written some years after the 1798 version of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, this notebook entry points to the problematic relationship between the ship, the mariner, and their surroundings in the poem. 'To William Wordsworth' offered an internal, confined engagement with reciprocal inspiration, whereas, in the *Ancient Mariner*, breaths are externalised to become part of the wider breathing world, and the internal interacts with the external on a more expansive scale. The winds and breezes in the *Ancient Mariner* are disconcertingly comforting and uncanny, familiar and unexpected. They are significant throughout the poem; sometimes absent when they might usually be present or directed specifically towards the mariner, they are also frequently described as 'breathing.' The mariner's own breath is closely related to these external 'breaths', and this is particularly notable in a poem in which the central narrative is told entirely on his breath, delivered out loud to the unfortunate wedding guest.

Although we usually experience this poem as a printed text, it is written in ballad form, as though part of an oral culture. The added glosses, however, make the later version(s), with which we are now most familiar, into something that appears as though it is a previously oral text that has been rendered into print and has been

[30] *CN,* II, 2052; Coburn asks, 'Is 2052 a comment on the "supernatural" in *The Ancient Mariner*?' (*CN,* II, Notes, 2052).

commented upon in the margins.[31] By making his poem appear as though it is an ancient ballad become printed text (and particularly this poem, which is concerned with storytelling and interpretations), Coleridge asks the question: 'What does it mean to tell a story?' The implicit presence of folkloric culture – of suspicion and hearsay, especially in relation to the albatross – and of stories that have been passed, on the breath, from person to person, emphasises the oral nature of the poem. As I go on to discuss in Chapter 5, Tennyson too is concerned with gossip, hearsay, and the substantiality or insubstantiality of the spoken word. At the centre of the *Ancient Mariner* is the mariner himself, endlessly repeating his strange story and reminding us that, for him, storytelling, like breathing, is a repetitive activity and, in that sense, is cyclical.

During Coleridge's sea journey to Malta he repeatedly noted of the state of the wind, and what this means to the progress of the Speedwell and the comfort of its passengers. The overwhelming importance and power of the wind creeps into the notebooks even before they have set off to sea, as the ship is prevented from starting by the unhelpful direction of the wind: 'Friday 6th April, 1804 – got on board the Speedwell, expecting to sail instantly/ but the wind westerd again.'[32] Coleridge's notebook entries on this voyage tend to incorporate a mix of technical details about wind speed and direction with more poetic descriptions of the wind and Coleridge's own reaction to it. The entry of 12 April, for example, moves from a specific focus on the wind for navigational purposes, to a consideration about passenger comfort, and

[31] Coleridge's revisions to the *Ancient Mariner* were multiple between 1798 and 1834, and it is unclear exactly when the glosses began to be conceived of or inserted into the text. This certainly happened between 1800 (the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*) and 1817 (*Sibylline Leaves*), and it is likely that the voyage to Malta was influential. For further discussion of Coleridge's revisions to the poem, see Jack Stillinger, 'The Multiple Versions of Coleridge's Poems: How Many 'Mariners' Did Coleridge Write?', *Studies in Romanticism*, 31 (1992), 127-46, and J. C. C. Mays' introduction to his edition of the poem (*CP,* pp. 365-71).
[32] *CN*, II, 1993.

finally, later on in the note, to aesthetic observations of how Coleridge's surroundings are affected by the wind:

> April 12th / Thursday / the wind from N.E. has changed 5 points to S. E., but we go on pretty well, & with far less Rocking [….] I particularly watched the beautiful Surface of the Sea in this gentle Breeze! every form so transitory, so for the instant, & yet for that instant so substantial in all its sharp lines, steep surfaces, & hair-deep indentures, just as if it were cut glass, glass cut into ten thousand varieties/& then the network of the wavelets, & the rude circle hole network of the foam/[33]

Similarly, the entry of 14 April, two days later, combines technical maritime vocabulary with metaphorical attempts to convey the sense of being at sea in strong and inconsistent winds: 'All Saturday Night brisk Gales interrupted by Squalls with heavy rains, during which variable or varying winds *shuttlecock'd* our poor brig – then after a small Becalmment up springs the regular Breeze again.'[34] On 4 May, Coleridge's triumphant, lengthy note records the exhilaration of having finally found a favourable wind; I include it here in its entirety to demonstrate Coleridge's attention to the wind during this voyage:

> ~~Thurs~~Friday Morning, ½ past 8, May 4th, 1804,
> ~~Bravo Capt Findlay & Capt. ran Headlong~~ when the Squalls were flitting and fleering and the Vessel was tacking and veering, [35]
>
> Bravo, Captain Findlay
> Who foretold a fair Wind
> Of a constant mind
> For he knew which way the wind lay, –
> Bravo! Captain Findlay!
> ---
> A Health to Captain Findlay!
> Bravo! Captain Findlay!
> When we made but ill Speed with the Speedwell,
> Neither Poet, not Sheep could feed well
> ~~The Poet eat Muffin~~, ~~the Sheep eat its Hay~~
> The Poet & Pig! How [?grief] rotted Liver
> And (yet) Malta, dear Malta as far off as ever
> Bravo! Captain Findlay –
> Foretold a fair wind

[33] *CN*, II, 1999.
[34] *CN*, II, 2014.
[35] 'Tacking and veering' also evokes the language of the *Ancient Mariner*, specifically the spectral ship that 'plunged and tacked and veered' (156).

Of a constant mind,
For he knew which way the Wind lay.

Well/ & we have got a wind the right way at last! – [36]

Throughout the voyage to Malta, Coleridge is alert to the technical and navigational aspects of the wind, and what it means in terms of comfort (or otherwise) to the passengers, as well as to its aesthetic possibilities. As we have seen, the *Ancient Mariner* is also on his mind for much of this voyage, reflecting the importance that he had placed on the wind in this fictional voyage, before he had personally experienced the things that he was describing; his experiences on the journey to Malta are an eerie confirmation of what he had already written about.[37]

The wind, or lack of it, plays a central role in the *Ancient Mariner*. As early as line 25, the marginal gloss states that the mariner and his ship sail 'southward with a good wind', and references to the wind continue, both to the extremes of the 'tyrannous and strong' 'Storm-blast' and to the delights of a 'good south wind' (25-28; 42; 87). The wind is mentioned repeatedly in the early stages of the poem, and it is also mentioned very specifically in terms of direction and strength. Initially, the ship sails southward (crossing the equator, as the marginal gloss adds, at lines 25-28). Then it is pushed further south by the 'Storm-blast' (42; again, the gloss elaborates that this is toward the South Pole). After struggling through the icy southern realm, the ship is pushed north by the 'good south wind' (87), and – as the gloss asserts – enters the Pacific and reaches the equator ('the Line', 103-6). The journey up to this point is thus clearly mapped, southward through the Atlantic, into the Southern Ocean, and northward into the Pacific and to the Equator. It is only once the mariner has shot the albatross that things start to go amiss and the ship is becalmed, leading to the near-

[36] *CN*, II, 2071.
[37] See also *CN*, II, 2048; 2052; 2060; 2086; 2090; 2100.

death of the mariner and the rest of the crew from thirst ('Day after day, day after day, | We stuck, no breath no motion', 115-16). The 'fair breeze' does actually carry on for twenty four lines after the shooting of the albatross, enough for the ship to sail all the way from the Southern Ocean to the equator in a 'fair breeze', but only to tease the mariner and the rest of the crew before dropping away entirely into 'silence' (103; 110). This delayed dying away of the wind perhaps reflects a slow death of the Albatross after it has been shot, but certainly suggests that retribution is not immediate. From this point onwards, the wind begins to act in an increasingly odd way, and seems to have a diminishing bearing on the movement of the ship itself, as I will discuss further. Notably, on the return journey, direction of travel is hardly mentioned at all; the only reference to it is in the gloss to lines 423-26, which states that, 'the angelic power causeth the vessel to drive northward faster than human life could endure'. By this point, presumably, the ship has already rounded Cape Horn, leaving the Pacific and starting northward through the Atlantic, but this fact must be guessed by readers. Is this due to the supernatural nature of the return journey, which does not have to rely on the natural winds of the world?

Coleridge purposely leaves questions unanswered about whether there is anything supernatural at work in terms of the breezes, particularly through his use of the potentially unreliable glosses. When the Albatross first appears it is linked to the wind: as soon as it has eaten food from the ship, 'a good south wind sprung up behind, [and] | The Albatross did follow' (71-72). However, the marginal gloss to these lines states, 'And lo! the Albatross proveth a bird of good omen', thus explicitly suggesting a direct link between this 'good' wind and the 'good' omen of the albatross's interest and proximity. Once the mariner has shot the albatross, the ship is suddenly and apparently inexplicably becalmed, with as little explanation given as when the albatross was shot:

'Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down' (107).[38] However, the other sailors lose no time in making this link when they accuse the mariner explicitly of being responsible for the lack of wind:

> And I had done an hellish thing,
> And it would work 'em woe:
> For all averr'd, I had kill'd the bird
> That made the breeze to blow.
> Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
> That made the breeze to blow! (91-96)

In the minds of the mariner's shipmates, there was a direct link between the albatross and the wind – 'the bird', they state twice in quick succession, 'made the breeze to blow'. This sentiment, of the mariner having committed a crime against nature, is reinforced by the marginal glosses, which describe the albatross as a 'pious bird of good omen' and a 'bird of good luck' (79-82; 91-96). The gloss continues, stating that the deathly lack of wind is in fact the Albatross beginning 'to be avenged' (119-22), while the ship is marooned 'day after day' in the hot sun in the doldrums, without a 'breath' of wind and therefore no chance of escape:

> Day after day, day after day,
> We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
> As idle as a painted ship
> Upon a painted ocean. (115-18)

The lack of breath also signifies a lack of life (the dead albatross), and this is emphasised by the simile of a 'painted ship | Upon a painted ocean': not only is there a lack of breathing life, there seems almost to be a lack of reality itself, as both the ship and its surroundings become like a work of art. Although Coleridge does not actually use the term, the doldrums can mean both a dejected, melancholy state of mind and a state of weather in specific regions of the world.[39] As M. H. Abrams has discussed in

[38] 'With my cross-bow | I shot the Albatross' (81-82).
[39] According to the OED, the earliest usage of 'doldrums' was in 1811, and it was initially used as a condition of low spirits: 'apparently in its origin a slang term, probably a derivative of Dold, or dol, Dull. For the form compare tantrum'; it cites the earliest maritime usage in 1823, by Byron (*Island* II xxi 44):

'The Correspondent Breeze,' a poet can be stirred from despondency by the correspondent external and internal breezes of change and inspiration.

It is apposite, then, that it is into this completely breathless, unmoving situation that Death and Life-in-Death sail their skeletal ship. Initially, the spectre ship tacks towards the mariner and the rest of the waiting crew – 'As if it dodged a water-sprite, | It plunged, and tack'd, and veer'd' – suggesting that the ship is sailing *into* the wind (155-56). However, it then stops tacking, apparently without reason, and moves forward in a far more uncanny way:

> See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!
> Hither to work us weal –
> Without a breeze, without a tide,
> She steadies with upright keel! (167-70)

Whether it is moving with the wind or tacking against it, a traditional sailing ship is always at a tilt, leaning with the strength of the wind in its sails. To see a sailing ship moving entirely upright would look completely wrong. In his recent biography of Coleridge, Malcolm Guite writes that, 'one of the most striking and dramatic effects in the whole poem is the way the ship comes towards them, uncannily moving against wind and tide on upright keel'.[40] This certainly is a striking moment, but his analysis is slightly off – the ship is not sailing against the wind; there is simply no wind, either to move with or against (this lack of wind is the practical issue for the sailors – they are 'stuck, nor breath nor motion', and therefore unable to get to any fresh water, leading 'every tongue, through utter drought' to be 'wither'd at the root' (135; 136)). Yet this slight misreading highlights the confusing nature of the wind in this poem – it constantly changes and shifts, leaving both the mariner and the wedding guest unsure as

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'doldrums', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 18 September 2017]. Merriam-Webster claims an earlier usage, in 1765, but, frustratingly, gives no reference for this: 'doldrums', *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online* <www.merriam-webster.com> [accessed 18 September 2017].

[40] Malcolm Guite, *Mariner: A Voyage with Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017), p. 377.

to quite how the wind is interacting with the ships and the people on them. Clearly there is something odd about the spectre ship – before it comes close enough for the mariner to be seriously concerned, he can tell that something is not quite right by the way that it is able to drive forward regardless of the wind: not being alive, the ship and its ghastly crew do not need breath in any form, either corporeal or atmospheric. This realisation is reinforced in the marginal gloss, which states: 'And horror follows. For can it be a ship that comes onward without wind or tide?' (167-70).

The autonomous spectre ship is probably influenced in part by legends of ghost ships that 'were usually reported as moving without wind, by magic' (such as the Flying Dutchman or the Octavius, which were both notorious in the late eighteenth century).[41] However, it may also be influenced by technological advances in sea-travel, which suggested the possibility that mariners might be able to become independent of the wind itself. The revolution in the relationship between ships and the wind that was already happening in the late eighteenth century has not yet been explored in any criticism of the *Ancient Mariner*. The majority of the main narrative of the poem is set on a sailing vessel at sea apparently in an age before the introduction of steamships, when sailors were completely reliant upon the wind. It was written and revised, however, in the wider context of a rapidly-developing world of transport, which I gestured towards in Chapter 1. Coleridge's note on the way to Malta, quoted at the beginning of this section, indicates the relevance of the scientific ('steam') as well as the magical ('or other power within itself') to a reading of the *Ancient Mariner.* The poem was written on the cusp of great change in maritime transport, and Coleridge's alertness to emergent developments and his vigorous responsiveness to innovation are pertinent here, as they are throughout his writing. Like the spectre ship, the steamships

[41] William Empson, 'Introduction', in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Selected Poetry*, ed. by William Empson and David Pirie (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 13-101 (p. 53).

that had come into imagination in recent years, and would soon come into being, similarly moved unswervingly, without wind or tide.[42]

On his voyage to Malta Coleridge more than once describes the sails of the Speedwell as 'bellying', simultaneously suggesting something human and life-like.[43] The sails visibly fill with air (as a person's 'belly' expands when they breathe in) giving the sailing ship a sense of vitality that a steamship would not have while under steam. Unlike the 'bellying' sails of the Speedwell, the 'dungeon-grate'-like 'ribs' of the spectre ship in the *Ancient Mariner* lack vitality (179; 185). If there were any wind, the spectre ship would not be able to harness it: it would blow straight through both the 'ribs' and the sails that hang 'Like restless gossameres' (184). This ship, however, operates outside the world of life and environment.

The sense of being in a sort of atmospheric 'dead zone' also begins to affect the bodily breath of the living people. Having been won by Death in the game of dice, the mariner's shipmates drop dead beside him. Notably, their breath is taken entirely: they drop down 'too quick for groan or sigh', an observation that is repeated in the next stanza: 'and I heard nor sigh nor groan' (214; 218). Far from there being any final words, there are no final sounds at all – not even the sound of the breath leaving the body – the breath has vanished suddenly and completely from every body on the ship, except the body of the mariner himself. Because Life-in-Death has won the mariner from Death in the game of dice, the mariner remains alive, but is still affected by the presence of the spectre ship. His ability to use his voice to access his emotional, human response to the situation seems to have evaporated, along with the literal breath of his crewmates:

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[42] Steam*boats*, of course, were already in being (discussed in Chapter 1).
[43] 'The elliptical figure of the Hull & its kindred motion prevent all abrupt or harsh contrast between the wood & the Canvass – to which the masts & in a [?brisk/fresh] gale the *stiff* Bellying of the Sails are aidant' (*CN*, II, 2012); 'Sails bellying with Sails under reef…' (*CN*, II, 2061).

> I look'd to heaven, and tried to pray;
> But or ever a prayer had gusht,
> A wicked whisper came, and made
> My heart as dry as dust. (245-49)

This 'wicked whisper' may be both internal and external: his own internal sense of guilt and a more separate evil that has come upon him. Guite suggests that it 'is a kind of infernal opposite to the work of the Holy Spirit', going on to explain that:

> in the Genesis narrative God originally creates humankind, forms his 'creature' out of the dust of the ground, and then stoops down and, in a kind of divine whisper, puts his breath within and breathes the human being into life. By contrast there is a kind of hideous 'decreation' taking place here in which the 'wicked whisper' comes and reduces the heart to dust again.[44]

There is certainly the confusing suggestion of a breathed word here stifling the potential for expression. The word 'whisper' in fact evokes the moment of the spectral ship's departure, some fifty lines earlier. After the fateful game of dice has been played out, night falls fast, and the ship leaves suddenly under the cover of darkness:

> The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:
> At one stride comes the dark;
> With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
> Off shot the spectre-bark. (200-4)

Again, there is ambiguity as to whether this is a physical whisper of the boat moving quickly through wind or air, or whether it is a lingering voice of evil. Either way, it strikes 'fear' into the heart of the mariner, a fear that still remains when he attempts to access prayer amid the loneliness of his situation, and before the great turning point of the poem, the blessing of the water-snakes (205). Although this spontaneous blessing is the moment that begins to lift the curse, the section that follows it is the most uncanny of the whole poem – even more so, I suggest, than the meeting with Death and Life-in Death, because it completely lacks explanation.

[44] Guite, p. 458.

In this section (Part V) the mariner begins to hear the sounds of a storm in the distance:

> And soon I heard a roaring wind:
> It did not come anear;
> But with its sound it shook the sails,
> That were so thin and sere. (310-13)

It is important here that it is the sound of the wind that actually moves the sails, rather than the wind itself. As we hear a few lines later, 'The loud wind never reach'd the ship | Yet now the ship moved on!' – the wind has the weird strength physically to affect the sails just with the noise that it makes, and in fact the ship itself here also begins to drive forward, despite the lack of wind (328-29). This, perhaps, reveals a poet's implicit hope that even without the originating breath, the concomitant sound can be moving, allowing a text to survive beyond the author. This implication is more overt in the ending of 'To William Wordsworth', in which Coleridge finds himself to be deep in thought following Wordsworth's performance of the *Prelude*, 'Absorbed, yet hanging still upon the sound' of Wordsworth's 'deep' voice (111; 105). Wind-like sounds remain central throughout Part V of the *Ancient Mariner*, along with the eerie ability of the ship to sail without any wind actually touching it, which together raise questions about the relationship between wind, ship and mariner, and, therefore, about the role of creative inspiration.

When the wind is loud yet still far away from the ship, and the ship begins to move forward regardless, some form of breath returns to the bodies of the mariner's dead shipmates: 'Beneath the lightning and the Moon, | The dead men gave a groan' (330-31). The men are literally 'inspired' as the marginal gloss to lines 328-30 states (both in terms of spirits entering their bodies, and in terms of those bodies being filled with breath). Yet although they 'groan' they do not actually speak or make any other sound until line 353, when, at dawn, 'Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths, |

And from their bodies pass'd' (353-54). These sounds begin to form part of the surrounding environment in strange and new ways:

> Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
> Then darted to the sun;
> Slowly the sounds came back again,
> Now mix'd, now one by one.
>
> Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
> I heard the skylark sing;
> Sometimes all little birds that are,
> How they seem'd to fill the sea and air
> With their sweet jargoning! (355-64)

The word 'darted' suggests a sense of agency. Just as the sounds have risen through the bodies and mouths of the dead men, independent of those bodies, the sounds then continue to have a life of their own now that they are in the wider atmospheric air. This does not seem out of place in a poem where wind can direct its 'breathing' in specific and focused ways. In 'To William Wordsworth', Wordsworth's voice and the poetry he is reciting seem to the listening Coleridge to be like the wind, 'driv[ing]' his soul 'in surges now beneath the stars' and causing it to 'dart' off, 'into the darkness' (97; 99; 100). And, as in 'To William Wordsworth', this moment also suggests cycles of inspiration, reminding the reader of the mutual dependency of lives upon one another. Coleridge was aware of new discoveries about the natural environment and its reciprocal respiratory relationship with humans and animals, particularly in terms of human dependency on both the environment and on the breathing of others. Here, something positive is gained from the breath of the dead men – they seem, by their breath, to begin to bring the surrounding environment back to life.

Even when these particular vocalised sounds stop, the sails of the ship still react as though they had wind in them, themselves continuing to make uncanny noises:

> It ceased; yet still the sails made on
> A pleasant noise till noon,
> A noise like of a hidden brook

In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune. (369-74)

The sounds that the sails make are reminiscent of familiar noises from the land, but the comforting scene of the simile is disconcerting as it is so out of place. The sails should not be making a noise at all, as we are immediately reminded in the next stanza ('Till noon we quietly sail'd on, | Yet never a breeze did breathe', 374-75). This moment resonates with Coleridge's note during the passage to Malta, in which he specifically observes and imagines the sound of a ship moving independently through its windless surroundings ('a noise of rushing, like that of a Vessel dashing on by steam or other power within itself, thro' the Calm, & making the Billows {& the Breeze, which} it did not find'). Throughout Part V, the mariner has been repeating the fact that the ship moves without a wind, strangely divorced from its environment. It is as if, now that all the rest of the crew are dead, they, like the ghastly pair on the other, spectral ship, have no need for breath of any kind. Internal, bodily breaths seem to be linked to the external breaths of the wider world – the mariner's ship has become one of those legendary ghost ships, that slide stealthily over the sea in their own dead world, and which may or may not really be there at all. Repeatedly, the mariner recalls the lack of wind:

The loud wind never reach'd the ship,
Yet now the ship moved on! (328-29)

The helmsman steer'd, the ship moved on;
Yet never a breeze up-blew (336-37)

Till noon we quietly sail'd on,
Yet never a breeze did breathe (374-75)

Towards the end of Part V it becomes apparent that there is a supernatural force driving the ship forward – the polar spirit 'from the land of mist and snow' who 'slid[es]' 'under the keel nine fathom deep' (404; 378). This seems to explain the ship's ability to move without the wind. However, what remains strange is the sound of the sails, which

continue as they have done all the time that the ship is moving, despite the fact that this movement is not due to the wind. As the ship is driven forward by the polar spirit, sound is created in the sails by the ship passing though the motionless air (rather than the breezes pushing the ship forward and thus creating the sounds in the sails at the same time). The sound of the sails only stops when the ship itself stops: 'The sails at noon left off their tune, | And the ship stood still also' (382-83).

The ship begins to move again in Part VI, but still without the wind – or, at least, without the wind touching the ship:

> The Sun, right up above the mast,
> Had fixed her to the ocean:
> But in a minute she 'gan stir,
> With a short uneasy motion—
> Backwards and forwards half her length
> With a short uneasy motion.
>
> Then like a pawing horse let go,
> She made a sudden bound:
> It flung the blood into my head,
> And I fell down in a swound.
>
> How long in that same fit I lay,
> I have not to declare;
> But ere my living life returned,
> I heard and in my soul discerned
> Two voices in the air.
>
> [….]
>
> *First Voice*
> 'But tell me, tell me! speak again,
> Thy soft response renewing—
> What makes that ship drive on so fast?
> What is the ocean doing?'
>
> *Second Voice*
> 'Still as a slave before his lord,
> The ocean hath no blast;
> His great bright eye most silently
> Up to the Moon is cast—
>
> If he may know which way to go;
> For she guides him smooth or grim.

See, brother, see! how graciously
She looketh down on him.'

First Voice
'But why drives on that ship so fast,
Without or wave or wind?'

Second Voice
'The air is cut away before,
And closes from behind.

Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high!
Or we shall be belated:
For slow and slow that ship will go,
When the Mariner's trance is abated.' (384-98; 411-30)

The marginal gloss to lines 423-27 reads: 'The Mariner hath been cast into a trance; for the angelic power causeth the vessel to drive northward faster than human life could endure'. The ship is moving at supernatural speed, without a breeze to propel it. Even more than this, we are told that there is in fact an absence of air, which is what allows the ship to move so quickly: 'The air is cut away before, | And closes from behind' (not 'the ship cuts the air before' – the cutting through the air seems to happen independently of it and before it gets to the air). The ship moves forward, propelled (according to the gloss) by an 'angelic power', in its own uncanny airless space. This calls to mind John 6. 21, immediately after the disciples have observed Jesus walking towards them on the water in the midst of strong winds and rough waters. Having been convinced that it is indeed him approaching them, they 'willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went'. Their boat is able to reach the shore 'immediately', appearing not to be impeded by the air and water through which it moves, but to take on a miraculous power to move at supernatural speed from one place to another. Likewise, the mariner's ship is driven faster than should physically be possible by an 'angelic power' that has taken control. For the time

that the mariner remains in his trance, the ship exists in a sort of vacuum, an imaginary space in which there is no air, and therefore no air resistance to impede it.[45]

People had been aware of a resistance that acts upon a body moving through air at least since Aristotle discussed this in his foundational work, *Φυσικὴ ἀκρόασις* (known in English simply as '*Physics')*. However, there seems to have been a renewed interest in the idea of air resistance in the eighteenth century. Short articles can be found in the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions* dealing with different aspects of air resistance, but the more influential work was Daniel Bernoulli's *Hydrodynamica* (1738).[46] In *Hydrodynamica*, Bernoulli laid the groundwork for a kinetic theory of gases (essentially that a great number of molecules make up a gas, and that the resistance we, or another object, feel moving though the air is caused by the impact of these molecules upon us). The mariner's ship is able to move without encountering any resistance acting upon it because the 'air is cut away before', suggesting an almost solid aspect to the air, or at least something physical through which the angelic force is able to cut.[47] Having been affected so strongly by the state of the breezes earlier in the poem (before the meeting with Death and Life-in-Death), the ship now exists entirely separate from them and without any need of them (in an uncomfortably similar way to that spectral ship, which moved 'without a wind').

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[45] Air resistance, or drag, is a force that acts in the opposite direction of an object moving through the air (parasitic drag specifically is about an object moving through a fluid, such as water or air). Air is composed of molecules (small particles), which move around at high speed, and cause an object moving through it to slow down by hitting it from in front.

[46] See, for example, J. T. Desaguliers, 'An Account of Some Experiments Made on the 27th Day of April, 1719. to Find How Much the Resistance of the Air Retards Falling Bodies', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 30 (1717-19), 1071-78, or Robert Lovell Edgeworth, 'Experiments upon the Resistance of Air', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 73 (1783), 136-43; Danielis Bernoulli, *Hydrodynamica*, *sive de viribus et motibus fluidorum commerntaii. Opus academicum ab auctore, dum petropoli ageret, congestum* (Argentorati [Strasbourg]: J. R. Dulsecker, 1738); Bernoulli was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1750.

[47] This idea is similar to Medhurst's inventions for using compressed air to force vehicles through a tube at great speed.

While the mariner is in his 'trance' the ship moves fast, without even the obstacle of air to impede its progress. However, this is only possible while he is in this strange trance. As the Second Voice warns, 'slow and slow that ship will go, | When the Mariner's trance is abated'. The mariner himself first describes the trance as a 'swound' with a physical cause (that, with the 'sudden bound' of the ship, the 'blood' was 'flung' into his 'head'), and then, in the next stanza, a 'fit'. However, it is also a strange deathlike state, possibly a dejection state, the waking from which he describes as the return of his 'living life'. While he is in the trance, he does not fully live, and the ship, on which he has been the sole 'living' being, is not fully in the physical world. One might read the trance as a sort of suspended movement, such as Coleridge experiences at the end of 'To William Wordsworth', where, to break the spell, he has to wake, after 'hanging […] upon the sound', to arrive at the moment of prayer. To be in a trance in the *Ancient Mariner*, is to be caught in a sort of windless, resistless movement, which is far from the more desirable natural breezes and movements. Etymologically, 'trance' communicates extended senses of movement, particularly in terms of passages or crossings (especially from life to death), as well as a sense of suspension.[48] The 'voices in the air', which the mariner apprehends on both an internal and an external level ('I heard, and in my soul discern'd | Two voices in the air'), may well be considered as inspiration of sorts. Following his death-like trance, when the ship (and he with it) is as divorced as possible from its surrounding environment, he begins to be welcomed back into that environment again.

Waking up from his trance, he finds that the 'spell' has been broken, and although he still feels 'Like one that on a lonesome road | Doth walk in fear and dread',

[48] 'trance', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 10 September 2018].

he does notice a breath of wind on him that seems to bring more positive connotations (444; 447-48):[49]

> But soon there breathed a wind on me,
> Nor sound nor motion made:
> Its path was not upon the sea,
> In ripple or in shade.
>
> It raised my hair, it fann'd my cheek
> Like a meadow-gale of spring –
> It mingled strangely with my fears,
> Yet it felt like a welcoming.
>
> Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
> Yet she sail'd softly too:
> Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze –
> On me alone it blew. (453-64)

The mariner himself can clearly feel this wind on him, but it touches nothing else; the sea is still, untroubled by the breeze. Moreover, the lexical choice, 'soon there *breathed* a wind on me' is particularly intimate. The way that it plays with his hair and cheek anticipates the beginning of Wordsworth's 1805 *Prelude*, where the 'gentle breeze, | That blows from the green fields' also 'beats against' the 'cheek' of the poet (I. 1-3). Like the renovating breeze in the *Prelude*, the spring-like quality of the breathing wind in the *Ancient Mariner* brings overtones of renewal, and seems to revive the mariner's spirit. Furthermore, it feels to him like 'a welcoming' (as Wordsworth would welcome the breeze in the *Prelude*: 'O welcome messenger! O welcome friend!') – a welcoming home, with all the sense of land that it brings (I. 5). It is redolent of a 'meadow-gale', and reminds the mariner also of the sounds that the sails made in Part V following the strange vocalisations that emanated from the mariner's re-inspired shipmates (the 'noise like of a hidden brook | In the leafy month of June', 371-72).

[49] Line 444 states 'and now this spell was snapt', and is reinforced by the marginal gloss, which affirms that, 'the curse is finally expiated'.

This repeated need to explain a foreign sensation by analogy – to articulate something difficult to comprehend for the landlubber or armchair traveller – is a familiar trope in late eighteenth-century travel literature, discernible in the work of writers as diverse as Hester Lynch Piozzi and Olaudah Equiano. Piozzi, for instance, in *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy and Germany* in 1789*,* repeatedly compares Lucca to aspects of England (such as the size or population of certain towns), and makes statements such as 'who ever has seen that singular spot in Derbyshire belonging to Mr Port has seen little Lucca in a convex mirror', while Equiano in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (also 1789) similarly makes reference to what the English reader (specifically) might understand, such as his description of the bellows in one of the houses in which he is enslaved as 'in some respects not unlike the stoves here in gentlemen's kitchens'.[50] Siobhan Carroll, in *An Empire of Air and Water*, suggests that this trope is particularly notable in maritime literature, as the sea is such a different world: 'one recurring trope of maritime literature is the notion that the culture and experience of the ocean are so radically different from anything the average landbound citizen experiences that a communication barrier exists between sailors and landsmen'. She offers a detailed reading of William Falconer's long poem *The Shipwreck* (a favourite in the Coleridge/ Wordsworth circle) in light of this:

> in Falconer's 1762 version of *The Shipwreck* we see early evidence of this trope as well as an early attempt to overcome the perceived barrier by educating readers in the language of the sea through a labelled diagram (of a ship, included in the frontispiece), documentation (the poem is heavily footnoted), and contextualized use of naval jargon.

[50] Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy and Germany*, 2 vols (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1789), I, 334; Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African, written by himself*, 2 vols (London: [n. pub.], 1789), I, 51.

Carroll then points out how this attempt to educate 'readers in the language of the sea […] was increasingly taken up in different genres by the turn of the century', and she gives the example of Vernor and Hood, who, in 1797, published a board game for children called *The Bulwark of Britannia*.[51] Created so as to foster a love of the sea, *The Bulwark of Britannia* was full of nautical terms like 'a shallop', 'a lighthouse', and 'safe arrival in port'.[52] Coleridge is consciously creating the language of a mariner who has had endless experience telling his story to those who might not understand or be able to empathise with many aspects of it, and is attempting verbally to communicate his extreme experiences to this wedding guest who may not have any knowledge of the sea, or even of life outside England. The unusual actions of the wind, and the sounds and sensations that it creates, may well have reminded the mariner of the home that felt so far away, but they also specifically need to be made relatable to others so that he can explain his experiences as widely as possible.

Asked by the hermit to explain himself on reaching land, the mariner is overtaken by the compulsive need to talk:

> Forthwith this frame of mine was wrench'd
> With a woful agony,
> Which forced me to begin my tale;
> And then it left me free. (579-82)

This 'strange power of speech', described by Daniel Karlin as a 'painful, physical catharsis', remains with him, appearing randomly and powerfully throughout his life, as an internal reminder of the external winds that had tormented him with their strangeness and inconstancy on his fateful voyage.[53] Furthermore, the way that his

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[51] Siobhan Carroll, *An Empire of Air and Water: Uncolonizable Space in the British Imagination, 1750-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), pp. 85; 93.
[52] It was important for the children to embrace the vocabulary so as to be able to '*communicate* effectively' (Carroll, pp. 93-94).
[53] Daniel Karlin, '"I have strange powers of speech": Narrative Compulsion after Coleridge', in *Coleridge's Afterlives*, ed. by James Vigus and Jane Wright (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 128-48 (p. 131).

‘frame’ is ‘wrench’d’ suggests a violent regaining of the breath, similar to the reanimating moment in ‘To William Wordsworth,’ which occurred ‘even as Life returns upon the Drowned’ (63). There is a huge gasp when a person takes their first breath after being nearly drowned, which produces a spasm of the body. After the brush with the breathless Life-in Death, and the suspension of the resulting trance-like state, Coleridge is perhaps suggesting a form of violent revival, made possible by the beneficence of the breeze, which so intimately caressed the mariner on his terrible voyage. The mariner has moved beyond the uncanny death-in-life of the crew, who groan but never revive. The breath is physical, bodily, yet also the instrument that helps to articulate the emotional and spiritual state. The link between speech, thought, and body is one that Coleridge found difficult to separate; physical pain and emotional pain were clearly related for him, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

‘With toil of Breath’: why did Coleridge talk so much?

One of the most memorable accounts of Coleridge talking is Keats’s description of their meeting on Hampstead Heath in April 1819, in his letter to George and Georgiana Keats:

> Last Sunday I took a Walk towards Highgate and in the lane that winds by the side of Lord Mansfield’s park I met Mr Green our Demonstrator at Guy’s in conversation with Coleridge – I joined them, after enquiring by a look whether it would be agreeable – I walked with him a[t] his alderman-after-dinner pace for near two miles I suppose. In those two Miles he broached a thousand things – let me see if I can give you a list – Nightingales, Poetry – on Poetical Sensation – Metaphysics – Different genera and species of Dreams – Nightmare – a dream accompanied with by a sense of touch – A dream related – First and second consciousness – the difference explained between will and Volition – so m[an]y metaphysicians from a want of smoking the second consciousness – Monsters – the Kraken – Mermaids – Southey believes in them – Southey’s belief too much diluted – A Ghost story – Good morning – I heard his voice as he came towards me – I heard it as he moved away – I heard it all the interval – if it may be called so. He was civil enough to ask me to call on him at Highgate Good Night![1]

It is a breathless account; the sparsity of punctuation (apart from profuse dashes) and the lack of complete sentences serve to heighten the unrelenting nature of Coleridge’s talk. In Keats’s story, Coleridge is not so much a person or a character as a voice that does not stop speaking. There is not even time for Keats to introduce himself to Coleridge or to greet Green, and he joins the party through ‘enquiring by a look whether it would be agreeable’ rather than interrupting the flow of Coleridge’s talk. The rest of the description is taken up with this monologue – mercilessly listed so as to seem as absurd as possible – which does not break either at Keats’s arrival or at his

[1] *The Letters of John Keats,* ed. by Maurice Buxton Forman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 323; notably, in Coleridge’s own later account of the same meeting (which lasts a mere ‘minute or so’), it is only Keats who speaks: ‘Let me carry away the memory, Coleridge, of having pressed your hand’. Coleridge’s version is recorded thirteen years later, rather appropriately, in *Table Talk* (*TT*, I, 325).

departure ('I heard his voice as he came towards me – I heard it as he moved away – I heard it all the interval'). It is Coleridge's voice that dominates the meeting.

Keats's report, which portrays Coleridge as someone who speaks incessantly and who leaves no space for silence or verbal response within his monologues, has become famous. However, it is not unique; accounts of Coleridge's ceaseless talk were ubiquitous both during his life and after his death, and possibly the only thing that the accounts really agree on is the fact that he talked a lot. As Carl Woodring notes in his introduction to *Table Talk*, 'It was universally acknowledged, although various and conflicting interpretations underlay the acknowledgement, that S. T. Coleridge was the greatest talker of his age.'[2]

As well as Keats's story there are others that have become familiar, as Coleridge's friends and acquaintances recognised the humorous potential of his conversation; comic vignettes of Coleridge the talker who droned on, unaware of the impression that he was giving and of his audience's reaction. On 5 December 1811, Henry Crabb Robinson noted that he had gone to listen to one of Coleridge's lectures on Shakespeare, at which the lecturer

> surpassed himself in the art of talking very amusingly witht. speaking at all on the subject to wh. the audience were especially invited. According to advt., C. was to lecture on *Romeo & Juliet* & Shakespeare's female characters. Instead, he began with a defence of school-flogging [...] without pretending to find the least connection between that topic and poetry.

Robinson continues to describe the subjects that Coleridge addressed, remembering that 'when Col. was so extravagantly running from topic to topic witht. any guide whatever,' at one point Charles Lamb said to Robinson: 'this is not so much amiss. C. sd. in his advt. he wd. speak abt. the Nurse in *Romeo & Juliet* & so he is delivering the

[2] *TT*, I, p. xl.

lecture in the character of the Nurse.'[3] Instead of a serious and thoughtful lecturer on Shakespeare, Coleridge emerges in this story as a garrulous buffoon who is unable to maintain control of, or even address, the subject upon which he is supposed to be focussing. A story told by Samuel Rogers presents a similar character:

> He talked uninterruptedly for about two hours, during which Wordsworth listened to him with profound attention, every now and then nodding his head as if to assent. On quitting the lodging, I said to Wordsworth, 'Well, for my own part, I could not make head or tail of Coleridge's oration: pray, did you understand it?' 'Not one syllable of it', was Wordsworth's reply.[4]

Ludicrously, even the speaker's (sometimes) best friend purports not to understand his discourse – the depth of their friendship at this moment is measured by Wordsworth's tolerance of Coleridge's breath alone. Hazlitt's assessment in 'On the Conversation of Authors' (1820) is the most brutal of these accounts:

> C – is the only person who can talk to all sorts of people, on all sorts of subjects, without caring a farthing for their understanding one word he says […] I firmly believe he would make just the same impression on half his audiences, if he purposely repeated absolute nonsense with the same voice and manner, and inexhaustible flow of undulating speech.[5]

Each of these accounts, including Keats's, connects with the received idea of Coleridge as incomprehensible and his talk as incessant waffle. This image of Coleridge became so established over the nineteenth century that in 1904, Max Beerbohm was able to publish a cartoon of Coleridge in *The Poets' Corner* with no more explanation than: 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Table-Talking'.

[3] Henry Crabb Robinson, *Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Lamb, etc. being Selections from the Remains of Henry Crabb Robinson,* ed. by Edith J. Morley (Manchester: The University Press, 1922), pp. 115-16.
[4] Quoted in Seamus Perry, 'The Talker', in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge,* ed. by Lucy Newlyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 103-25 (p. 108).
[5] Quoted in Perry, 'The Talker', p. 112.

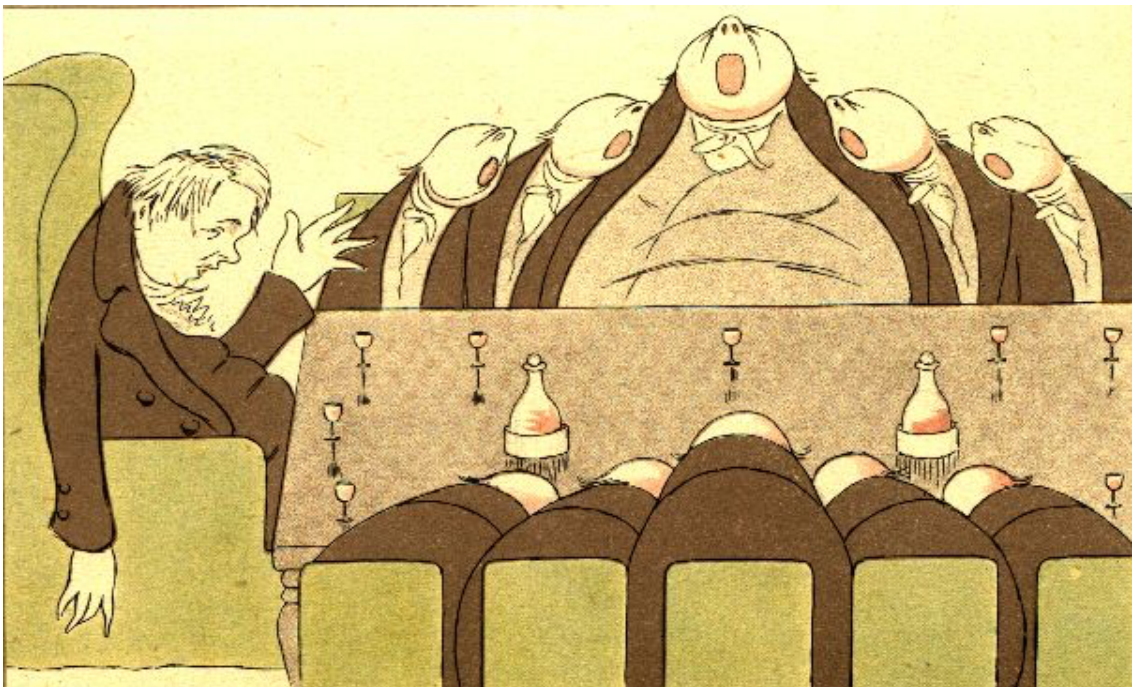

Figure 4: Max Beerbohm, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Table-Talking* (1904)

Beerbohm's illustration shows a man sitting at the head of a table, at which ten other men are fast asleep. He himself is drooping, but still talking, one hand gesticulating while the other hangs limply at his side – the suggestion being that he is almost sending himself to sleep with his talk, everyone else having already succumbed. Beerbohm was able to play on a trope that was well established in the public consciousness by this time.

The really curious thing about these accounts of Coleridge talking, however, is the continuousness of Coleridge's talk. Coleridge seemed to talk constantly, and those who heard him generally agreed him to be 'the supreme monologuist who astounded, and astounded in part by seeming to need no external stimulus.'[6] Madame de Staël's assessment of him as 'a master of monologue, mais qu'il ne savait pas le dialogue' is memorable because it has become so familiar, backed up by other accounts. Writing to Sir William Rowan Hamilton on 30 June 1834, Viscount Adare describes the way that Coleridge 'rambled on', and states that he 'ventured, when a pause came, to put in a

[6] *TT*, I, p. xlv.

word. This happened twice'. Similarly, Samuel Rogers related to Alexander Dyce how, at breakfast, 'Coleridge talked for three hours without intermission'. As with Keats's report, others also draw attention to the impression that Coleridge-the-man was dominated by Coleridge-the-talker. Bryan Waller Procter relates a story that he dates as occurring in 1823, which demonstrates the way that Coleridge's talk had the tendency to take over his life:

> In illustration of his unfailing talk, I will give you an account of one of his days, when I was present. He had come from Highgate to London, for the sole purpose of consulting a friend about his son Hartley ('our dear Hartley'), towards whom he expressed, and I have no doubt felt, much anxiety. He arrived about one or two o'clock, in the midst of a conversation, which immediately began to interest him. He struck into the middle of a talk very soon, and held the 'ear of the house' until dinner made its appearance at about four o'clock. He then talked all through dinner, all the afternoon, all the evening, with scarcely a single interruption. He expatiated on this subject and on that; he drew fine distinctions, he made subtle criticisms. He descended to anecdotes, historical, logical, rhetorical; he dealt with law, medicine, and divinity, until, at last, five minutes before eight o'clock, the servant come in and announced that the Highgate stage was at the corner of the street, and was waiting to convey Mr. Coleridge home. Coleridge immediately started up oblivious of all time, and said, in a hurried voice, 'My dear Z— , I will come to you some other day, and talk to you about our dear Hartley,' He had quite forgotten his son and everybody else, in the delight of having such an enraptured audience.

Coleridge's talk not only overshadows everyone else, but also the object of his own visit, and, as other accounts have noted, leaves no space for anyone to engage with him in conversation. In other reports his voice takes an even more central role, as Coleridge's daughter-in-law, Mary Pridham Coleridge, related to a friend:

> I remember Mrs. Derwent Coleridge's telling me of her recollections of her father-in-law in her early married life. She listened with great wonder, she said, to the flow of his discourse; there was no hesitation or pause – on and on it went. The bedroom candles would be brought in and placed on a table near the door of the drawing-room. Coleridge would move slowly across the room, continuing his discourse the while, continuing it as he went through the hall to the staircase, continuing it as he slowly mounted the stairs, until his voice was lost in the distance.[7]

[7] All quoted in *TT,* I, pp. xlv; lxii-lxiii; xlix; lv; lvii.

The focus of this recollection is the experience of listening to Coleridge's talk. 'The flow of his discourse' is uninterrupted by 'hesitation,' by others, or even by Coleridge leaving the room (presumably) to go to bed. Like Keats, Mary seems to experience the voice almost as separate from the person, as an entity in itself. Coleridge moves about, walking 'near two miles' across Hampstead Heath or 'slowly mount[ing] the stairs,' but his voice continues regardless, seemingly independent of his actions. Just as Keats 'heard his voice as he came towards' him, 'heard it as he moved away' and 'heard it all the interval,' so Mary was drawn to 'the flow of his discourse,' which 'continu[ed]' regardless of where he went and what his did, until 'as he slowly mounted the stairs […] his voice was lost in the distance.' Although there is an obviously corporeal presence in both accounts, the voice takes priority, becoming seemingly disembodied.

As well as being overwhelming in its ceaselessness, Coleridge's talk also struck many as beautiful, and accounts show that he had a capacity for self-elevation and reaching great heights of eloquence. Wordsworth wrote about Coleridge's talk as 'a majestic river, the sound of or sight of whose course you caught at intervals […] flashing out loud and distinct', while, in 1818, William Hazlitt ended his lecture 'On the Living Poets,' from his series of 'Lectures on the English Poets,' with a striking description of his own memories of Coleridge's famous talk:

> He talked on for ever; and you wished him to talk on for ever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort; but as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet. His voice rolled on the ear like the pealing organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought [….] and it rings in my ears with never-dying sound.[8]

Hazlitt here offers yet another description of Coleridge's ceaseless talk, but while this remark is hyperbolic, it is also positive. Disregarding the fact that at the time of this lecture, Coleridge was still alive and talking and would go on entertaining others with

[8] Quoted in Perry, 'The Talker', p. 121; Hazlitt, p. 320.

his talk for another sixteen years, Hazlitt offers a sense of the potential afterlife of Coleridge's talk: 'it rings in my ears with never-dying sound'. Yet again, the talk is offered as separate from the person, 'as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet', an aspect which Henry Nelson Coleridge also focuses on. In the Preface to the second edition of *Specimens of the Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, in 1836, Henry Nelson Coleridge wrote of his uncle:

> I have seen him at times when you could not incarnate him, — when he shook aside your petty questions or doubts, and burst with some impatience through the obstacles of common conversation. Then, escaped from the flesh, he would soar upwards into an atmosphere almost too rare to breathe, but which seemed proper to *him*, and there he would float at ease.[9]

Henry Nelson Coleridge's experience of listening to Coleridge bears similarities to those of other listeners, in that the talker seemed to take over from the person. In Henry Nelson Coleridge's description, though, it is not only as if Coleridge's talk is separate from his body, or could be separate from it; it also seems that Coleridge the talker could 'escape from the flesh' to disappear into the highest and most insubstantial atmosphere, and float where the air is so thin that it is hardly possible to breathe. Henry Nelson Coleridge suggests that Coleridge was able to talk where even breathing was 'almost' impossible for others.

Everyone who remembered Coleridge focused on his talk, whether negatively, positively, as a humorous tale, or as a touching recollection. Everyone agreed that his talk was remarkable; whether or not what he said was itself memorable, the occurrence of it was. Coleridge baffled and inspired, frustrated and enchanted his listeners. He himself attempted to defend, explain or discuss his constant talk on multiple occasions (as I will examine later in this chapter). So why did Coleridge talk so much and so

[9] *TT*, II, 10.

continuously? Considered together, the accounts that I have discussed in the preceding pages suggest that his reasons for talking were more complex than might initially appear. I propose that it is necessary to go back to the breath in order to consider this properly.[10]

Coleridge's lungs

In a letter to John Thelwall in 1796, Coleridge wrote about himself: 'I cannot breathe thro' my nose – so my mouth, with sensual thick lips, is almost always open. In conversation I am impassioned'.[11] Even though this may be meant somewhat in jest, he implies that his talk in part rests on a difficulty in breathing through his nose, causing his mouth, literally, to be open, ready for talk to pour out of it. Hazlitt's first impressions of Coleridge concur with this suggestion: 'his mouth was gross, voluptuous, open, eloquent'.[12] In his notes on 'Kubla Khan,' J. C. C. Mays observes that Coleridge 'noticeably possessed' a 'slight constriction of the nasal passages,' which would have affected his speaking voice.[13] Coleridge's apparent inability to breathe through his nose seems to have been linked to his pneumatic condition, which caused him trouble with breathing throughout his life. He described experiencing 'an asthmatic Puffing' in a letter to Tom Wedgewood in 1803, and wrote to Thomas Poole in 1804 that he was 'suffering grievously from asthma in consequence of the Drizzle, Fog, & Stifling Air'.[14] During his 1804 passage to Malta, he wrote to his wife of the 'dreadful Langour, weight on my breathing, & a sort of sudden fits of Sleep with

[10] As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the fact that breath is a bodily thing, drawn into the lungs and then physically expelled again, lends a kind of substance to speech. It is not just insubstantial, but physical too.
[11] *CL*, I, 260.
[12] Quoted in Holmes, *Early Visions*, p. 180.
[13] *CP*, p. 512.
[14] *CL,* II, 991; *CL,* II, 1035.

nervous Twitches in my Stomach and Limbs [….] & then comes on the dreadful *Smothering* upon my chest &c,' and to Daniel Stuart of the way that his 'breathing smothered' when he attempted to read.[15] References to constricted breathing also appear in the poetry, although these tend often to be used in relation to a psychological state. In the revised version of 'The Day Dream', published in the *Morning Post* in 1802 as 'The Day Dream, From an Emigrant to his Absent Wife', the day-dreaming speaker 'gaz[es] with stifled breath' on the vision in front of him, while in stanza III of 'A Letter To----' Coleridge describes his inability 'to lift the smoth'ring Weight from off [his] Breast'.[16] In 'After Bathing in the Sea at Scarborough in Company with T. Hutchinson, August 1801', a short poem about swimming in the sea against the advice of the 'sage Physician,' the line, 'And lo! I breathe untroubled Breath,' highlights a rare moment of being able to breathe freely (8).

Although opium apparently exacerbated Coleridge's problems with breathing (as he wrote in a notebook in 1804, 'N. B. Opium always in the day-time increases the puffing Asthma, eye closing, & startlings') it was not, as was suggested to him, the sole cause of his troubles.[17] His autopsy was performed by anatomists appointed by J. H. Green, and revealed an enlarged heart and collapsed lungs. Molly Lefebure suggests that Coleridge would have been pleased about this discovery, and she quotes his remarks to Dr Sainsbury in 1815:

> Have you ever heard of a man whose Hypochondriasis consisted in a constant craving to have himself opened before his own eyes? [...] Wounded by the frequent assertions – 'all his complaints are owing to the use of opium' […] if I could but be present while my Viscera were laid open!

Lefebure notes that 'the autopsy thoroughly vindicated him', as it showed that:

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[15] *CL,* II, 1143; *CL,* II, 1145.
[16] *CP*, Variorum Text, p. 898; *CL*, II, 791.
[17] *CN*, I, 1977.

> The left side of the chest was nearly occupied by the heart, which was immensely enlarged, and the sides of which were so thin as not to be able to sustain its weight when raised.
>
> The right side of the chest was filled with fluid enclosed in a membrane having the appearance of a cyst, amounting in quantity to upwards of three quarts, so that the lungs on both sides were completely compressed.[18]

The fact that 'the lungs on both sides were completely compressed' suggests that Coleridge really did experience significant trouble breathing during his life, and offers a physiological explanation for his frequent sensations of being smothered, which occurred more frequently at moments of particular emotional difficulty. Perhaps the continuousness of his talk, therefore, was less about never stopping to take a breath (as it appeared from the outside), but more an attempt to maintain the flow of breath so as not to be stifled; he kept speaking to keep the passage open for breath, as though if he did not speak (out) he would not be able to breathe (in). To talk without pause, I suggest, was to avoid a sense of constriction from his obstructed passageways.

Furthermore, his pneumatic condition meant that he was both intensely aware of his corporeality and also fearful of the potential insubstantiality of death, being unable completely to trust his body (I will discuss these anxieties later in this chapter). To feel constantly that access to air might be switched off by one's own body, by lungs that do not have enough space in the chest to function as they should, is to be aware both of the physicality of breathing and of its precariousness. Writing about her own experience of pathological breathlessness in *Phenomenology of Illness,* philosopher and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) sufferer Havi Carel emphasises the sensation of what she terms 'bodily doubt' as a symptom of this experience: 'Trapped. That is what breathlessness feels like. Trapped in the web of uncertainty [….] The fear of suffocation, of being unable to breathe, the fear of collapsing, desaturated to the point

[18] See Molly Lefebure, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Bondage of Opium* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1974), p. 49.

of respiratory failure.' This experience, she continues, 'gives rise to a host of psychological reactions: despair, fearfulness, anxiety, depression, loss of hope.' It is not just the physical sensations of suffocation that affect Carel, but the inability to be able to trust her own body:

> A mix of fear, confusion, anxiety, and a sense of unreality enfolded me when I was diagnosed. It was not just a nightmare coming true; it was also the most destabilizing event I have ever experienced (Carel 2015). I experienced my body as a fickle foe, a traitor, a disappointment; I was plagued by bodily doubt.[19]

Like Carel, Coleridge also experienced both the physical discomfort of difficult breathing and fear of suffocation, but also the psychological aspect of unreality, destabilization and bodily doubt.

It might be, therefore, that Coleridge talked so much in an attempt to substantiate himself and to ward off the (seemingly inevitable) insubstantiality of death. Through talk, he breathed himself into being, attempting to prove that he was not unsubstantiated by his failing, stifling body. Talking became a habitual means of self-realisation and self-substantiation. He spoke almost to help himself breathe and to prove that he was breathing. I posit that this was an ingrained habit of self-realisation that not only explains the constant talking but also connects to other aspects of his life and work, specifically his performativity and his interest in discipleship, all of which contributed to the nineteenth century's inability to write a successful anecdotal biography of Coleridge.

[19] Carel, pp. 109; 110; 114; In Chapter 4 of *Phenomenology of Illness,* Carel, one of the PIs on the Wellcome Trust funded project *Life of Breath*, analyses the chronically ill person's sense of bodily doubt from a physical and philosophical perspective.

Death of Berkeley

The reason that Coleridge talked so much and so continuously had, as I have suggested, a physiological aspect; however, this was also exacerbated by extreme emotional distress. The period between 1799 and 1804 was particularly difficult for him – from the death of his second child while he was away in Germany, through the years of his marriage breakdown and trouble with the Wordsworths, and his unfulfilled love for Sara Hutchinson, before sailing off to Malta, under the impression that he might not return alive – and this is also the period in which he most often describes sensations of physical and emotional suffocation (examples of this are quoted in the first paragraph of the previous section, on Coleridge's lungs).[20] In the following pages I focus on a period of particular emotional trouble at the beginning of these years.

On 10 February 1799, Coleridge's second son, eight-month-old Berkeley, died while Coleridge was studying at the University of Göttingen in Germany. Although Berkeley died in the February, Coleridge did not hear of the death until two months later in a letter from Thomas Poole, who had not wanted to disturb him in his studies (Poole had also strongly encouraged Sara Coleridge not to write to her husband immediately, as she had wanted to do, but to wait until he had written the first letter in April).[21] The death of his baby, whom he had not seen for some months, profoundly affected Coleridge, leaving him confused by 'a mass of Pain,' which he repeatedly attempted to express in his notebooks and in letters to Poole and Sara.[22] Yet these 'baby pangs' would not resolve themselves into any recognised form of grief, and Coleridge noted the rift between his immediate emotions and his ability to express them; there

[20] See *CL,* II*,* 1115, and *CL*, II, 1123, regarding Coleridge's fear of dying abroad.
[21] See *CL*, I, 478n.
[22] *CL*, I, 478.

was a gap between the expectation and the reality of grief, and also an apparent separation of the body and mind in enacting that reality.[23]

Coleridge's first recorded response to the news of Berkeley's death was a reply to Poole on 6 April:

> I cannot truly say that I grieve – I am perplexed – I am sad – and a little thing, a very trifle would make me weep; but for the death of the Baby I have *not* wept! – Oh! this strange, strange, strange Scene-shifter, Death! that giddies one with insecurity, & so unsubstantiates the living Things that one has grasped and handled![24]

Coleridge's body was not acting as it was supposed to do, and he could only write about his inability to weep, and to react appropriately. Furthermore, the giddiness and feelings of dizzying 'unsubstantiati[on]' suggest an element of breathlessness, which is a common physical reaction to intense grief.[25] The theatrical imagery serves to emphasise the sense of unreality. As a 'Scene-shifter,' 'Death' seems merely to change the illusion of what surrounds Coleridge, rather than actually taking away something that was ever real. The word 'unsubstantiates' here becomes applicable to the past as well as the present.[26] The description of death as a 'scene-shifter' further emphasises the sense of dizziness and unreality – in the theatre everything melts away with the change of a scene, and finally dissolves, like Prospero's 'insubstantial pageant,' like the breath itself, into 'thin air' (IV. 1. 155; 150).[27]

Part of this strange process of unsubstantiation is the sense not only of Coleridge himself unsubstantiating in his own mind, but also of the unsubstantiation of

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[23] *CL*, I, 493.
[24] *CL*, I, 479.
[25] See, for example: Wolfgang Stroebe and Margaret S. Stroebe, *Bereavement and Health: the Psychological and Physical Consequences of Partner Loss* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 8-13; J. Shep Jeffreys, *Helping Grieving People – When tears are not enough: A Handbook for Care Providers* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 65-66; Colin Murray Parkes and Holly G. Prigerson, *Bereavement: Studies of grief in adult life* (London: Penguin, 2010), pp. 21-25.
[26] 'Unsubstantiates' is Coleridge's own neologism according to the OED, which defines it: 'To divest of substance; to render unsubstantial': 'unsubstantiate, v.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 15 September 2015].
[27] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, pp. 1221-43.

the memory of the physical child. On 8 April, Coleridge finally wrote to his wife about the death of Berkeley:

> Dear little Being! – he had existed to me for so many months only in dreams and reveries, but in them existed and still exists so livelily, so like a real Thing, that although I know of his Death, yet when I am alone and have been long silent, it seems to me as if I did not understand it. – Methinks, there is something awful in the thought, what an unknown Being one's own Infant is to one! – a fit of sound – a flash of light – a summer gust, that is as it were *created* in the bosom of the calm Air, that rises up we know not how, and goes we know not whither! – But we say well; it goes! it is gone! [...] I will not believe that it ceases – in this moving stirring and harmonious Universe I *cannot* believe it.[28]

The physicality of the memory of baby Berkeley changes dramatically from this letter, in which there is an inability to fix the dead child in his mind as a real, substantial thing, causing Berkeley to become simply 'a fit of sound – a flash of light – a summer gust,' and a letter that Coleridge wrote to his wife less than two weeks later, on 23 April, in which he mourns his 'poor little Baby,' and states that 'at this moment I see the corner of the Room where his cradle stood – & his cradle too – and I cannot help seeing *him in* the cradle. Little lamb! & the snow would not melt on his limbs!'[29] The substantiality of the memory of the child fluctuates in Coleridge's mind over the weeks following the news of the death of Berkeley; sometimes extremely tangible ('I cannot help seeing *him in* the cradle. Little lamb! & the snow would not melt on his limbs!'), and sometimes no more than 'a fit of sound – a flash of light – a summer gust.' Once he is no longer breathing and his physical body begins to disintegrate, Berkeley also starts to unsubstantiate in Coleridge's mind.

Baby Berkeley's breathing was on Coleridge's mind following the child's death, and he voiced this concern to Sara: 'I have some faint recollection that he had

[28] *CL*, I, 481.
[29] *CL*, I, 484-85.

that difficulty of breathing once before I left England – or was it Hartley?'[30] The uncertainty about which child had in fact had 'difficulty of breathing' (if there had been any problem at all) draws attention to Coleridge's absence as a father of both children – at this crucial moment of emotional distress he is unable to differentiate between them, as it is so long since he has been at home. Two weeks later he would write to Poole:

> there are moments when I have such a power of Life within me, such a conceit of it, I mean – that I lay the Blame of my Child's Death to my absence – *not intellectually*; but I have a strange sort of sensation, as if while I was present, none could die whom I intensely loved.[31]

It is his own absence that seems to begin the process of unsubstantiating his son. Although Coleridge does not mention experiencing a sense of breathlessness himself at this point, his giddiness and feelings of dizzying unsubstantiation describe similar sensations, as do the feelings of being stifled and being unable to express himself fully. These concerns about Berkeley's breath may be in part transferred anxieties from his own perennial breathing problems. It is in the years immediately following this experience of giddying loss that Coleridge most often describes feelings of physical and psychological suffocation.

Coleridge's distress about the child's death in his absence, and his concern about the potential 'difficulty of breathing' leading up to the death, contrast poignantly with the 'calm' sense of reciprocal breathing in 'Frost at Midnight' that I discussed in Chapter 2. In 'Frost at Midnight' the 'gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm' inspire Coleridge to imagine Hartley's future life, in which the child might 'wander like a breeze' (43; 54). While this future remains an airy insubstantiality in the poem, it nonetheless has the potential to be 'substantiated' by the living child (as the adult Hartley would later attest: 'the prayer was heard: I "wander'd like a breeze"'). By

[30] *CL*, I, 485; In a letter to Poole on the same day he is openly terrified about the possibility of Hartley dying too: 'My dear Poole! don't let little Hartley die before I come home. – That's silly – true – & I burst into tears as I wrote it' (*CL*, I, 495).
[31] *CL*, I, 490.

contrast, Berkeley's insubstantial presence, with his possible 'difficulty of breathing', no longer has the potential to become substantial through living: he remains 'a fit of sound – a flash of light – a summer gust, that is as it were *created* in the bosom of the calm Air, that rises up we know not how, and goes we know not whither!' Substantiality is in part based on having a meaningful future, on being a continuous being that will keep living, and Berkeley no longer embodies this. His present and potential substantiality have been taken away by the physical loss of his breath. It is through the breath, therefore, that Coleridge attempts to substantiate him – talking in the years that follow may, in part, be a way to cut through the constriction and create continuity between himself and the lost child. As he wrote to Sara following the news of the death, it was when he had 'been long silent' that he struggled to 'understand' the situation.[32]

At the centre of Coleridge's response to Berkeley's death is a paradoxical fear of both insubstantiality and mere physicality. What had once been solid and substantial could no longer be trusted or relied upon. Baby Berkeley, already something of a physical and emotional unknown to the absent Coleridge, had died suddenly and unexpectedly, and on top of this Coleridge's own body seemed to be unreliable. Coleridge was fascinated by the physical and the visceral throughout his life, but also grappled with the anxiety that the death of the body might be the end of everything. As quoted in the previous section, he claimed to feel a 'constant craving' to 'be present while my Viscera were laid open' so as to be able to be sure that not 'all my complaints are owing to the use of opium.'[33] He wished to be able to be present after the fact of death so as to assure himself that he would be positively regarded when he was no longer there to defend himself. And, as discussed earlier, the autopsy did, indeed,

[32] *CL*, I, 481.
[33] *CL,* IV, 578.

appear to vindicate him on this point (although it did not have much impact on the dominance of opium in biographies of Coleridge).

Coleridge was also particularly interested in the importance of his body as a marker of his emotions and feelings; for example, he wrote to Sara Coleridge in 1802, in reaction to a comment in her letter: 'it immediately disordered my Heart, and Bowels [….] My bodily Feelings are linked in so peculiar a way with my Ideas'.[34] These intense physical reactions to emotional and mental upset were common for Coleridge, and he recorded them repeatedly in his notebooks and letters. One effect of this seems to be that the tangible – that which can be 'grasped' – and the insubstantial or abstract became closely intertwined for him. In a letter to Southey in 1803, he complained: 'I truly dread to sleep/ it is no shadow with me, but substantial Misery foot-thick, that makes me sit by my bedside of a morning, & *cry–*.'[35] Coleridge's attempt to solidify an abstract emotion here emphasises the mutability of both the substantial and the insubstantial in his experience. Returning to the letters following the death of Berkeley, we can see that when he coined the term 'unsubstantiates' in the letter to Poole, he was responding directly to the death of his son, a physical body that would soon begin to decompose and lose its substantiality in the physical world, as well as in his mind.

This pervasive sense of insubstantiality can be understood both as a pathological and as a cultural condition. In *Literature and Insubstantiality in Later Eighteenth-Century England,* Frederic Bogel suggests that poetry and prose works share 'a common attitude toward human experience: specifically, a pervasive awareness of its insubstantiality'. He states that, 'this condition, which is closely related to hypochondria as the eighteenth century understood it, is a version of the state of

[34] *CL,* II, 886-87.
[35] *CL,* II, 982.

existential disrepair that R. D. Laing has labelled "ontological insecurity"'.[36] Laing's 'ontologically secure person' has:

> a sense of his presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person [….] He will encounter all hazards of life […] from a centrally firm sense of […] his integral selfhood and personal identity, of the reliability of natural processes, of the substantiality of natural processes, of the substantiality of others [....]
>
> By contrast, the ontologically insecure person may experience himself as chaotically insubstantial, or temporally discontinuous [….] The line between self and other may be indistinct or shifting, and other persons, things, or natural processes may seem as unreliable or insubstantial as the self.[37]

Bogel acknowledges that Laing is not attempting to describe an eighteenth century state, but a 'pathological state'. However, he suggests that this idea is nevertheless useful to consider in relation to eighteenth century anxieties.[38] Coleridge, writing at the end of the period on which Bogel concentrates, certainly struggles with, in Laing's terms, 'ontological insecurity', a condition which seems to have been exacerbated for Coleridge by periods of extreme distress or grief. Charles J. Rzepka posits that Coleridge's early loss of his father and 'the de facto loss of his mother' led to 'deeply rooted convictions of the insubstantiality of the self and doubts about its place in the world.'[39] I suggest that Coleridge's ceaseless talk is in part an attempt to redress this sense of insubstantiality.

Coleridge's personal notes suggest that, in the months of intense emotional distress following the death of Berkeley, he found that talking fell short of his

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[36] Bogel, p. 24; 25; See pp. 24-29 for Bogel's specific examples, including Johnson, Boswell, Cowper, Hume, and Coleridge himself.
[37] R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (New York: Pantheon, 1969), p. 39 (quoted in Bogel, p. 25).
[38] Bogel, p. 25; Bogel points to the work of philosophers such as Locke, Berkeley and Hume in terms of the erosion of substance as a concept, and states that 'it seems scarcely an accident […] that the experience of insubstantiality should acquire such importance in English literature at precisely the time when one major current of philosophic speculation had virtually succeeded in removing the concept of substance from the vocabulary of philosophy' (p. 30).
[39] Charles J. Rzepka, *The Self as Mind: Vision and Identity in Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 29.

expectations, and he focuses particularly on this sense of disconnect.[40] The fragmented notebook entries in May 1799 focus on a lack of correlation between what is felt and what is actually said:

> The Voice was in my heart – ~~you~~ ~~he~~ it is only the echo which you hear from my Mouth[.]
>
> Heart the husband, the Tongue the wife – every word that comes not from the heart, is therefore a Son of a Whore[.]
>
> A pretty little space between the Tongue & the heart, like that between East & West[.][41]

Coleridge uses the written word (of the notebooks) to express the experience of speaking, and of discovering the act of speaking to be insufficient fully to express the emotions. What Coleridge said did not seem to convey what he really felt and meant. In fact, throughout the same month he repeatedly articulates a frustration that the 'misery' of verbal language is not enough to convey his true feelings and experiences.[42] Despite this, he seemed to need to keep on talking so as to attempt to express himself. It was when he was 'alone and [had] been long silent' that he struggled even to understand the fact of the death of his child.[43] He had not been physically 'present' to keep safe this 'intensely loved' child who may have had 'difficulty of breathing,' and the continued talk was, perhaps, a way of creating a link with that dead child.[44] By talking continuously, Berkeley would not disappear completely, even if the talk, immediately after Berkeley's death, did not convey Coleridge's precise feelings.

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[40] The Maniac in Shelley's *Julian and Maddalo* also expresses this inability to voice deep grief, or to gain comfort from the voicing of it: 'And not to speak my grief – O, not to dare | To give a human voice to my despair' (304-5), see *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 128.
[41] *CN*, I, 432/13; 432/22; 432/23.
[42] 'O that I were an Hogarth! – What an enviable Talent it is to have [a G]enius in Painting!' (*CL,* I, 507), and 'These lines, my dear Poole, I have written rather for my own pleasure than your's – for it is impossible that this misery of words can give to you, that which it may yet perhaps be able to recall to me. – What can be the cause that I am so miserable a Describer?' (*CL*, I, 511); He returns to this concern in the autumn of 1799 (*CN*, I, 524), and then again in the autumn of 1803 (*CN*, I, 1489; 1495; 1554).
[43] *CL*, I, 481.
[44] *CL*, I, 485; 490.

In later poetry, Coleridge returns to this anxiety about the failure of the body to produce the right words, and to behave in a way appropriate to the occasion (particularly in relation to his children). Consider, for example, the conclusion to Part Two of *Christabel*:

> A little Child, a limber Elf
> Singing, dancing to itself;
> A faery Thing with red round Cheeks,
> That always *finds*, and never *seeks* –
> Makes such a Vision to the Sight,
> As fills a Father's Eyes with Light!
> And Pleasures flow in so thick and fast
> Upon his Heart, that he at last
> Must needs express his Love's Excess
> With Words of unmeant Bitterness.
> Perhaps 'tis pretty to force together
> Thoughts so all unlike each other;
> To mutter and mock a broken Charm;
> To dally with Wrong, that does no Harm –
> Perhaps, 'tis tender too and pretty
> At each wild Word to feel within
> A sweet Recoil of Love and Pity.
> And what if in a World of Sin
> (O sorrow and shame! should this be true)
> Such Giddiness of Heart and Brain
> Comes seldom, save from Rage and Pain,
> So talks, as it's most us'd to do. –

Although this was published in 1816, these lines appear originally in a letter to Southey in 1801, fifteen years earlier. In the letter they are written immediately after a paragraph about the children, prompting Leslie Griggs to state that the poetry was 'obviously […] inspired by Hartley Coleridge'.[45] The key moment in this excerpt is the appearance of the unexpected 'Words of unmeant Bitterness.' The internal rhyme and enjambment of the couplet ('Must needs express his Love's Excess | With Words of unmeant Bitterness') feels precipitative, which creates the effect of haste, but without the reader having had time to prepare for the juxtaposition of 'love' and 'bitterness.' Furthermore, the additional syllables in the hypermetric first line of the preceding couplet ('And

[45] *CL*, II, 728n.

Pleasures flow in so thick and fast') mean that it is not only 'Pleasures' that 'flow in so thick and fast,' but words as well: the writing echoes the 'Excess' of impression and feeling. Like the speaker in the poem, the reader is unprepared for the outburst of 'Bitterness' in response to the 'Pleasures' of fatherhood. The speaker experiences a sense of disconnect between the inner feeling and the outer expression of it, although the poem itself achieves a consonance between feeling and expression. The speaker in the poem hears himself express 'each wild Word' seemingly unable to do anything about it, and feeling at each word a confusing 'sweet Recoil of Love and Pity.'[46]

The 'Giddiness' therefore, as well as being the condition that has prompted this outburst, is also present in the reaction to it: a reeling state of confusion at having responded in this 'unmeant' way. Like Coleridge's unexpected reactions to the 'Scene-shifter, Death,' which left him giddied 'with insecurity,' the speaker is here unable to express his inner feelings in an appropriate outward form. In the final line, agency is to some degree taken away from the speaker and given instead to the state of giddiness itself, which 'talks, as it's most us'd to do'. The person is taken over by the giddiness, which has agency. This difference suggests the sense of something 'other' having taken over the body and mind. An etymological reading of the word 'giddy' would corroborate this: the OED notes that it comes from the Old English *gidig*, meaning insane, as in 'possessed by a god,' and directly related to *ylfig* ('elf-possessed').[47] In the immediate reaction to news of Berkeley's death it is Coleridge's 'strange, strange, strange Scene-shifter, Death! that giddies one with insecurity' – in that instance the death of the child triggered the state of giddiness. Whether or not Coleridge was aware of the etymology of the word 'giddy,' it seems apposite that it is the appearance of the 'limber Elf' (Hartley) two years after the death of Berkeley, and the subsequent

[46] This is almost an inversion of the response of the mariner to the water snakes in Part IV of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*: 'A spring of love gushed from my heart, | And I blessed them unaware' (284-85).
[47] 'giddy', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 2 May 2016].

giddying grief that Coleridge experienced, which precipitates the sensation of being 'giddy,' or 'elf-possessed', in this excerpt.

A similar instance is related in 'The Day Dream' – the original, more biographical, version of 'The Day Dream: From an Emigrant to his Absent Wife' (1801-2). Coleridge is dreaming of Sara Hutchinson and, in his dream, believes that she is about to kiss him, when he is woken by an 'elfish laugh':

> 'Twas Hartley, who behind my Chair had clomb,
> And with his bright Eyes at my face was peeping –
> I bless'd him – try'd to laugh – & fell a weeping. (29-30)

This tangled sense of love, anger, and guilt results again in an inability to control his reactions. The painful disappointment at being woken from the dream is intensified because it is also disappointment at seeing Hartley, to whom he is actually very attached. At this moment, when he is physically near his child and the best reaction would have been to laugh and join in the fun and games, he cannot, and is reduced simply to 'weeping.'

Reading 'The Day Dream', it is tempting to suggest that there is an extra depth of disappointment here because, on seeing the living Hartley with his 'bright Eyes,' Coleridge is reminded of the fact that his younger son is no longer alive. However, this would be both over-reading the poem, and adding in something that simply is not there. Hartley is the subject of the 'The Day Dream,' just as it is Hartley in *Christabel*, and – earlier, of course – Hartley in 'The Nightingale' and 'Frost at Midnight.' Berkeley is missing from the poems: as the 'Scene-shifter, Death' began to unsubstantiate him physically and then in Coleridge's mind as well, so he is finally unsubstantiated as a literary figure. It may be that echoes of Coleridge's 'pangs' of grief live on in the poetry, but Berkeley himself – 'a fit of sound – a flash of light – a summer gust' – is no longer there.

After Berkeley

Coleridge would revisit these anxieties concerning the unsubstantiation of baby Berkeley and the fear of mere physicality in 'Human Life: On the Denial of Immortality', published in *Sibylline Leaves* in 1817.

> If dead, we cease to be; if total gloom
> Swallow up life's brief flash for aye, we fare
> As summer-gusts, of sudden birth and doom,
> Whose sound and motion not alone declare,
> But *are* their *whole* of being! If the Breath
> Be Life itself, and not its Task and Tent,
> If even a soul like Milton's can know death;
> O Man! thou vessel purposeless, unmeant,
> Yet drone-hive strange of phantom purposes! (1-9)

The central, Platonic, argument of 'Human Life' that, without a sense of immortality, life is meaningless, recalls the particular concerns that Coleridge faced in 1799 at the death of baby Berkeley.[48] In 'Human Life' he posits that, if 'total gloom' engulfs this brief moment of life forever at death, then we have just travelled briefly as 'summer-gusts' of air, which are nothing in themselves but 'sound and motion'. These lines distinctly recall his anguished words about little Berkeley, who had been deprived of the chance of personhood through growth by his early death: simply 'a fit of sound – a flash of light – a summer gust'. Images and phrases that Coleridge used in his grief-stricken letter to Sara Coleridge in 1799 reappear in 'Human Life': the 'unknown Being' in the letter has become the 'whole of being' in line 5 of 'Human Life'; the 'fit

[48] That Coleridge evidently has the sudden and unexpected death of his child on his mind after such a gap of time might affect a reading of 'Human Life,' however, there is disagreement about when this poem was first begun. E. H. Coleridge suggests a compositional date of 1815, but does not give any further details (*The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by E. H. Coleridge, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), p. 426). Mays also tentatively dates the poem as being written somewhere between '1811-1815?,' as the 'only other attempt at a poem in the manner of Donne' was written in Notebook 18 in April-May 1811. Mays does propose an alternative date 'very much earlier, possibly some time after Oct 1795', but this is similarly based on the possibility that Coleridge's *Fragments of an Epistle to Thomas Poole*, 'which might have included lines on Donne, may have existed from Oct 1795 onwards' (*CP*, Variorum Text, p. 1100).

of sound' the 'sound and motion' in line 4; the 'flash of light' has become 'life's brief flash' in line 2; the 'summer gust' the 'summer-gusts' in line 3; and the question of whether the little Being 'ceases' has become the hypothetical 'cease to be' in line 1. Finally, the possibility that human life might simply be 'summer-gusts, of sudden birth and doom' in 'Human Life' recalls the unexpected death of the baby, who lived briefly as a 'summer gust.' 'Human Life' also picks up more generally on some of the themes that emerged in the letters and notebooks in 1799 and, like those notes and letters, is ambiguous.

The 'breath of life' (Genesis 7. 22) is so commonly used that it might be considered a 'dead' metaphor; Coleridge's conditional construction of the metaphor here reinvigorates it. The lines 'if the Breath | Be Life itself, and not its Task and Tent' seem to contemplate the idea of the physical body ('Breath') being all that there is to life, rather than being the 'Tent,' something which temporarily houses the soul, or spirit, during its existence on earth. However, the alternative sense of the term 'Tent', to 'heed' or 'care', offers the premise that the 'soul' ('Breath') might be life itself, and not just a metaphorical function that life conducts or tends to (like Tennyson's concern in LVI. 7 of *In Memoriam* – 'The spirit does but mean the breath').[49] As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, breath is part of the physical body, or part of its action and what it relies on to keep living, but it is also insubstantial and, in multiple languages, is etymologically related to the spiritual. Breath, for Coleridge himself, is similarly compound. His own ability to breathe was a struggle, and the threat of suffocation was both physical and emotional, but he also relied on his breath to support his continuous talk. His physical body was notably substantial – both in his largeness and in the way that he was constantly aware of its pathology – but keeping up a

[49] 'tent', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 20 September 2018].

constant stream of articulated breath was a chance to attempt to substantiate the non-physical self as well. O'Gorman writes that in 'Human Life', 'Coleridge came implicitly to fear that he was himself not unlike [a] hot air balloon – mere emptiness of air that would presently cease, grow old, and descend not to the earth but beneath it.'[50] Indeed he did, and I suggest that his conversation practice throughout the rest of his life was an attempt to resist being like that hot air balloon.

I have said that the death of baby Berkeley seems to fall at the beginning of a particularly difficult few years for Coleridge in which he struggled with real and imagined sensations of being stifled. In 1802, we can again see this pattern of distress leading to a sense of constriction against which he must struggle. O'Gorman suggests that, in 'A Letter to ----', 'a dispirited Coleridge breathed out the quality of his own mind', and he demonstrates the ways in which the poem is breath-like in its style.[51] However, this poem is also about the breath itself, or more often about an inability to breathe. For the opening six stanzas of 'A Letter to ----' breathing is difficult, as expression is difficult. In stanza II Coleridge describes,

> A Grief without a pang, void, dark, & drear,
> A stifling, drowsy, unimpassion'd Grief
> That finds no natural Outlet, no Relief
> In word, or sigh, or tear –[52]

At this point he is unable to communicate even by an unarticulated sigh, recalling the stifling inability to cry or properly to express grief that he experienced at Berkeley's death. He comes back to this feeling of being stifled in stanza III, when he describes his inability 'to lift the smoth'ring Weight from off [his] Breast'.[53] The emotional weight of 'Grief' and the physical constriction of the lungs combine here to create a substantial sensation. I have shown that in other poems and letters, the emotional and the physical

[50] O'Gorman, p. 373.
[51] O'Gorman, p. 372.
[52] *CL,* II, 790.
[53] *CL,* II, 791.

are closely connected. However, later on, in stanza V, he suddenly finds the 'smoth'ring Weight' lifted with easy spontaneity:

> Ten thousand times of Friends & Lovers blest!
> I spake with rash Despair,
> And ere I was aware,
> The Weight was somewhat lifted from my Breast![54]

We can see here that he actually speaks out loud before the emotional feeling of release: the mouth moves before the mind thinks. Throughout the poem there has been a sense of constriction, of being stifled, of feeling empty and of being unable to express this feeling, but in the end it is speaking that lifts the weight, even though the speaking was unplanned and 'rash'.

Afterlife of Coleridge's talk

Coleridge's concerns about the fragility of life extended to anxieties about the ephemerality of his talk, and its ability to create a more substantial version of himself. He mourns a perceived lack of permanence in relation to his own talk, when compared with that other great talker, Samuel Johnson:

> As Conversationalists is not S. T. C. [compared with] Dr. Johnson as Eol[ian] Harp is not Single Drum [?] Hence the stores of remembered Sayings of the latter – while S. T. C. sparks / Sparks that fall upon a River, / A moment bright, then lost for ever.[55]

Coleridge sets up his own talk as insubstantial and lacking solidity, especially when compared with the 'stores of remembered Sayings' of Dr. Johnson. However, this note is more a criticism of his listeners than of his own abilities. He creates 'sparks', but they unfortunately 'fall upon a River' and are 'lost for ever'; rather than igniting a great

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[54] *CL,* II, 792.
[55] Quoted in Perry, 'The Talker', p. 119; The 'Sparks that fall upon a River, / A moment bright, then lost for ever' are an allusion to Robert Burns' lines, 'Or like the snow falls in the river, | A moment white – then melts for ever' (61-62) in 'Tam o'Shanter. A Tale' (*The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns,* ed. by James Kinsley, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), II, 559).

fire, his 'sparks' are doused and washed away. This anxiety about ephemerality becomes fuel to his need to keep talking.

At other moments, however, the same concerns lead him to a sense that he is influencing others with his talk, and that he is not being lost or unsubstantiated in the process. A notebook entry in 1803 is both an attempt to offer yet another explanation for his constant talk, and also makes a claim for the usefulness of talk in the process:

> Egotistic Talk *with me* very often the effect of my Love of the Persons to whom I am talking / My Heart is talking of them / I cannot talk continuously to them of themselves – so I seem to be putting into their Heart the same continuousness as to me, that is in my own Heart as to them. –[56]

Through his talk, he claims to be creating something (love) in the other person. The lexis, 'putting into their Heart', suggests an element of substantiality. He is putting something of himself into the other person, as though for safekeeping, similar to the 'stores of remembered Sayings' of Dr. Johnson. This aspect of Coleridge's talk seems to be one he was particularly concerned with in 1803. In a letter to Thomas Poole in the same year he wrote:

> I cannot produce in myself even the dimmest *Feeling* of any such conversation. Yet I talk so much & so variously, that doubtless I say a thousand Things that exist in the minds of others, when to my own consciousness they are as if they had never been.[57]

This is, again, both a disowning of anything unfortunate that he might have said, but also reveals a hope that this might be the case – that, even if he himself is forgetting it, he is creating something solid in the minds of others. That his talk can become 'Things that exist in the minds of others' offers the possibility of breath as permanent, rather than ephemeral, and plays into concerns about the afterlife of his talk.

While Coleridge was exploring these concerns in a relatively private way in notebooks and letters, similar concerns were starting to be considered in the wider

[56] *CN*, I, 1772.
[57] *CL*, II, 1011.

cultural context of the early nineteenth century. In 1837, Charles Babbage put forward his views on Natural Theology in *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise. A Fragment*, in response to the eight *Bridgewater Treatises* commissioned by the Earl of Bridgewater, Francis Henry Egerton. Chapter Nine of Babbage's *Ninth Bridgewater Treatise*, 'On the permanent Impression of our Words and Actions on the Globe we inhabit', is focused in large part on the way that spoken words can have a physical effect on the air around us:

> The pulsations of the air, once set in motion by the human voice, cease not to exist with the sounds to which they give rise [….] The motions they have impressed on the particles of one portion of our atmosphere, are communicated to constantly increasing numbers [….]
>
> The waves of air thus raised, perambulate the earth and ocean's surface, and in less than twenty hours every atom of its atmosphere takes up the altered movement due to that infinitesimal portion of the primitive motion which has been conveyed to it through countless channels, and which must continue to influence its path throughout its future existence.
>
> But these aerial pulses, unseen by the keenest eye, unheard by the acutest ear, un-perceived by human senses, are yet demonstrated to exist by human reason [….]
>
> Thus considered, what a strange chaos is this wide atmosphere we breathe! Every atom impressed with good and with ill, retains at once the motions which philosophers and sages have imparted to it, mixed and combined in ten thousand ways with all that is worthless and base. The air itself is one vast library, on whose pages are for ever written all that man has ever said or even whispered. There, in their mutable but unerring characters, mixed with the earliest, as well as with the latest sighs of mortality, stand for ever recorded, vows unredeemed, promises unfulfilled, perpetuating in the united movements of each particle, the testimony of man's changeful will.
>
> […] the atmosphere we breathe is the ever-living witness of the sentiments we have uttered.[58]

Writing only three years after Coleridge's death, Babbage addresses the relationship between the human voice and the air from an emerging scientific perspective. In Babbage's words, talk does not disappear on being released from the mouth, but

[58] Charles Babbage, *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise. A Fragment* (London: John Murray, 1837), pp. 109-16.

continues to exist forever. Once it has come into existence on the air, it becomes a permanent record of what has been said, with the subtle vibration of the air a witness to it. Babbage suggests that because of this, we are essentially constantly breathing in other people's voices, breathing in the memory of things that have been said. It is as though we are ingesting talk by breathing in other people's breath. Written around the same time as emerging ideas and understanding about the way that we ingest physical components of other people (as I discussed in the sections on 'Dust' and 'Cremation' in Chapter 1), this is, to some degree, a metaphorical version. However, this is not just breath, but breath that has developed meaning through being articulated (as, in Coleridge's description of the voice and the *Prelude* itself, Wordsworth's 'last strain dying awed the air' in 'To William Wordsworth', 48). In Babbage's hypothesis, the human voice does not just have a quality of permanence in relation to the air, but also a quality of substantiality. The air becomes a 'library', with 'pages' on which spoken words are metaphorically 'written'. The idea of the air as a 'vast library' gives the impression of the air being shaped into something material through being articulated, which then enters the air, adding to the library. Like Coleridge's 'Things that exist in the minds of others' or his notion of the 'stores of remembered Sayings' of Dr. Johnson, Babbage puts forward a theory in which there is a tangible permanence to talk, although he suggests that this is universal, rather than related to the particular character or ability of the speaker. Instead, the air 'retains at once the motions which philosophers and sages have imparted to it, mixed and combined in ten thousand ways with all that is worthless and base.' Charles Dickens paraphrased Babbage's proposal in a speech made in Birmingham in 1869, in a way that emphasises the argument about permanence. 'A mere spoken word', he states, 'a single articulated syllable thrown into the air may go on reverberating through illimitable space for ever and for ever, seeing

that there is no rim against which it can strike, no boundary at which it can possibly arrive'.[59] Spoken words could therefore exist forever, just as Hazlitt had suggested about the quality of Coleridge's own talk ('His voice rolled on the ear like the pealing organ [….] and it rings in my ears with never-dying sound).[60] At roughly the same time that Coleridge was alive and talking himself into substantiality and permanence, others had begun to see this possibility as a scientific reality. In Babbage's theory, 'airy nothings' are really 'airy somethings,' and they do not fade away.

Coleridge would never know Babbage's ideas about the permanence of the spoken word, but he nonetheless lived and acted as though he did. I have suggested that he continually attempted to make himself substantial and permanent through the insubstantial and ephemeral art of speech. His pneumatic condition, exacerbated by intense emotional experiences of loss, meant that he was uncomfortably aware of the fragility of life and fearful of what a loss of breath would lead to. As he suggested in his notebooks and letters in 1803, part of this was about creating continuity, a way of resisting a sense of 'ontological insecurity' and 'bodily doubt'.[61] By talking continuously to others, he saw himself to 'be putting into their Heart the same continuousness'.[62] Coleridge talked to create links between himself and others, and to establish a sense of continuity through his continued existence in others. As he wrote to Poole: 'I talk so much & so variously, that doubtless I say a thousand Things that exist in the minds of others'.[63] His talk seemed able to create something substantial in other people, thus forging both a link with them and a sense of permanence, as those 'Things' seemed now to 'exist in the minds of others' rather than disappearing with the close of

[59] Quoted in John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) pp. 16-17.
[60] Hazlitt, II, 320.
[61] Quoted in Bogel, p. 25; Carel, p. 109.
[62] *CN*, I, 1772.
[63] *CL*, II, 1011.

the sentence. Speaking offered a sense of both personal and interpersonal continuity; talking continuously proved that he was not alone, not insubstantial, not stopping.

Despite Coleridge's own anxieties about ephemerality and insubstantiality, he was – as I have shown – particularly well remembered and recognised for his talk. Henry Nelson Coleridge's posthumous edition of Coleridge's remembered sayings in *Table Talk* was very popular, and much of the way that people remembered Coleridge was based around his talk, both the fact of his talking and the way that he talked.[64] Biographer Richard Holmes notes that,

> Coleridge is remembered as the greatest talker of his age – that ephemeral form most difficult to re-create in biography [….] So I have attempted, from the very start, to set Coleridge talking, to tell the story through his own magnificent – and constantly humorous – flights of phrase and metaphor. I have tried to make his *voice* sound steadily through the narrative, and indeed in the end to dominate it.[65]

For Holmes, it is important that Coleridge tells his own story as much as possible, in the most dynamic way. Holmes's focus on the value of Coleridge's talk in helping to tell his own story throws light on the implications that the talk may have had for Coleridge's early biographical reception. Coleridge was sketched repeatedly in successive biographies, particularly in the years following his death, but none were successful in the nineteenth century.[66] There have been a number of biographies since the early twentieth century, but as Ralph Pite explains, 'the absence in the nineteenth century of any equivalent to these biographies […] becomes striking as Coleridge's exceptional talents emerge'. Pite suggests a number of reasons for this absence, including 'the scandal of his opium-addiction' and the lack of 'shape' to his life; I would add that this is in part due to the fact that anecdotal records of conversation in

[64] See *TT*, I, pp. xcix-c.
[65] Holmes, *Early Visions*, pp. xiii-xvi.
[66] For a detailed discussion of the nineteenth century's biographical offerings of Coleridge, see Ralph Pite, 'Introduction', in *Lives of the Great Romantics: Coleridge*, ed. by Ralph Pite (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1997), pp. xi-xxi.

many ways become the biography.[67] Coleridge's spoken words survived in *Table Talk* and in the multiple accounts of those who had met and listened to him.

Coleridge achieved substantiality through talk. Through talk, he breathed himself into being, thereby endowing the breath with a kind of permanence and materiality. Instead of turning to the written word as the most important record, Coleridge created substance through speech. This is not to say that the written word was not important to Coleridge, or to the way that he has been remembered, but more that the spoken word was not merely an ephemeral thing. In fact, as Perry has noted, 'the boundaries between Coleridge the talker and Coleridge the writer are always breaking down': *The Friend* and *Biographia Literaria* were both dictated rather than written, while Henry Nelson Coleridge liberally added to *Table Talk* with extracts from the notebooks and letters. After describing the way that Henry Nelson Coleridge and Thomas Allsop 'freely mingled remembered snippets of conversation and fragments of Coleridge's letters and notes,' Perry states that, 'both editors were recognising, legitimately enough, a basic kinship between his manner in notebook or correspondence and the conversational style they knew so well from the life.'[68] This fluidity is exacerbated by the fact that we only have written records of Coleridge's speech, and also by the fact that what we now think of as his written works were often texts for performance that were altered on each delivery. Mays writes that, while it is 'true that Coleridge is careful and careless over different things in different versions [….] separate versions are for the most part consistent with themselves, and have their own justification almost as separate performances might'. He continues: 'punctuation, capitals, and italic interpret the words for a particular occasion, as if they were a score,

[67] Pite, p. xii; xiii; xiv.
[68] Perry, 'The Talker', p. 114.

subtly modifying their values'.[69] Poems became performances, and Coleridge extended this way of thinking also to the poetry of others. In Chapter 2 I discussed how Coleridge was struck by the way that Wordsworth's spoken words seemed to persist in the air, creating an impression even after the voice that had spoken them ceased; he was particularly affected by Wordsworth's rendition of the *Prelude*, and lingers on the 'deep voice' of the poet performing his 'long sustained Song' (104-5).

Others remarked that the way that Coleridge delivered his talk was integral to a full understanding of its meaning. Charles Lamb stated that many people who read the 'abstruser parts of his "Friend" would complain that his works did not answer to his spoken wisdom. They were identical. But he had a tone in oral delivery which seemed to convey sense to those who were otherwise imperfect recipients'.[70] Coleridge actively considered the importance of performance in a lengthy note written in 1809, in which he posits that punctuation is above all a guide to performance:

> In short, I look on the stops not as logical Symbols, but rather as dramatic *directions* representing the process of Thinking & Speaking conjointly – either therefore the regulation of the Breath simply, for in very long periods of exceedingly close reasoning this occurs; or as the movements in the Speaker's Thoughts makes him regulate his Breath, pause longer or shorter, & prepare his voice before the pause for the pause [….]
> It is the first and simplest duty of a Writer […] to make the pauses, which the movements of his Thought require in order to be intelligible, consistent with an easy regulation of the Breath [….] Therefore I call them not symbols of Logic, but dramatic directions, enabling the reader more easily to place himself in the state of the writer or original Speaker.[71]

Coleridge's argument, that punctuation can be considered mainly as 'dramatic directions,' highlights the level of significance he attributes to speaking. If punctuation is 'dramatic directions,' then the text becomes a basis for performance, to be spoken out loud rather than read silently. That it is 'the first and simplest duty of a Writer […] to make the pauses […] consistent with an easy regulation of the Breath' foregrounds the

[69] *CP*, p. lxxxvi.
[70] Quoted in *TT,* I, p. xli.
[71] *CN*, III, 3504.

worth of performance, of the spoken. In this note, writing becomes a way of recording an idea for speech, until the moment that it can again be rendered out loud by another speaker. The suggestion that, through following these 'dramatic directions,' the reader may 'more easily […] place himself in the state of the writer or original Speaker' offers the possibility that by writing down and punctuating speech so that it can be recreated as closely as possible by someone else at a later stage, that someone will be able to breathe life back into the words because they have been shown where, and how, to breathe. This focus on the mechanics of the breath as a significant aspect of writing, reading, and punctuation is not surprising, given Coleridge's constant awareness of his own breath, and of its limits. However, it also emphasises the importance of performance to him, as a way of challenging ephemerality and insubstantiality. For Coleridge, there is a curious parallel between the spoken word as a means of continuously creating substance and permanence of the self, and a wider cultural sense of spoken things never being lost, as I have discussed in relation to Babbage.

Even at the very end of his life, Coleridge was concerned with the spoken word, as his own pathological experience of constricted breathing worsened. In his 'Epitaph', written October-November 1833, he seems to speak to the reader by addressing them directly:

> Stop, Christian Passer-by! Stop, Child of God!
> And read with gentle heart. Beneath this Sod
> A Poet lies: or that which once seem'd He.
> O lift one thought in prayer for S. T. C.
> That he who many a year with toil of Breath
> Found Death in Life, may here find Life in Death.
> Mercy for Praise, to be forgiven for Fame,
> He ask'd, and hoped, thro' Christ. Do Thou the Same.

The epitaph, 'in the long tradition of epigraphs […] mimicked speech, as if the engraving on the tomb were still a living language, spoken by a living being'. [72] Invoking a traditional epigraphic formula ('siste, viator') in itself connotes a communal voice, and also seemed to offer a way for Coleridge to carry on speaking. His talk is able to continue in the speech-like lines of the 'Epitaph,' creating a sense of continuity between the 'Poet' and the 'Passer-by,' between the Coleridge who lived 'with toil of Breath' and the Coleridge who now hopes to 'find Life in Death.' His pathological difficulties with breathing are on his mind towards the end, as the words of the 'Epitaph' 'play the "gentle breast" of the viewer off against the struggling chest of the poet'.[73] The 'Epitaph' seems not just to speak to the 'passer-by,' but to accost them in the manner of the mariner outside the wedding, who also 'stoppeth' those who attempt to pass him so as to tell his own gruelling life tale and to exhort the listener to consider his own approach to life and death as well. Coleridge has long been linked with his fictional mariner, who has a physical, 'agon[ising]' drive to talk at great length to his many long-suffering listeners.[74] The mariner experiences a sense of being left 'free,' for a time, after the 'agon[ies]' have forced him to speak, yet for Coleridge, the strain of continuing to speak, inadequately supported by collapsed lungs, would not abate, though the drive persisted. The speech-like 'Epitaph' offers a continuation of Coleridge's own talk and attempts to create a sense of inter-personal continuity with the 'Passer-by' who might stop to contemplate the written words.

This need to create a sense of continuity with others, as well as within himself, may have contributed to the importance of disciples for Coleridge, increasingly towards the end of his life. Both 'community' and 'communicate,' of course, share a root in

[72] O'Gorman, p. 375.
[73] O'Gorman, p. 376; most versions use 'gentle heart,' although one, in Henry Nelson Coleridge's hand, does use 'gentle breast' (see: *CP*, Variorum Text, for more detail).
[74] For further discussion of Coleridge's own similarity to his fictional mariner see Karlin, 'I have strange powers of speech', and Guite.

'communis' (common).[75] When he was in his later years, living with the Gillmans as the 'Sage of Highgate,' Coleridge 'enjoyed surrounding himself with talented young men'.[76] Pite states that, 'Coleridge was a phenomenon who attracted disciples: J. H. Green, Thomas Allsop, F. D. Maurice, Julius Hare, John Sterling, and Coleridge's nephews, John Taylor and Henry Nelson Coleridge, all sought wisdom in the Gillmans' house in Highgate'.[77] One particularly keen disciple who gathered with others around Coleridge was the young Arthur Henry Hallam, the Cambridge undergraduate who would be immortalised after his death by Tennyson in *In Memoriam*. Perry points out that, 'Hallam was soon a member of the circle' and 'although references are few, all evidence suggests that [he] quickly became an initiate'.[78] Hallam, like others, was particularly drawn by Coleridge's talk. In 1829, he would immortalise his admiration for Coleridge in his poem*, Timbuctoo*, which was written for the Chancellor's Medal for an English poem at Cambridge (and which was won, that year, by Tennyson). In it, Coleridge is remembered in the following lines:

> Methought I saw a face whose every line
> Wore the pale cast of Thought; a good, old man,
> Most eloquent, who spake of things divine.
> Around him youths were gathered, who did scan
> His countenance so grand and mild; and drank
> The sweet, sad tones of Wisdom, which outran
> The life blood, coursing to the heart, and sank
> Inward from thought to thought, till they abode
> 'Mid Being's dim foundations, rank by rank
> With those transcendent truths, arrayed by God
> In linked armor for untiring fight,
> Whose victory is, where time hath never trod.[79]

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[75] 'community, n.' and 'communicate, v.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 15 July 2018].
[76] Seamus Perry, 'Hallam and Coleridge', *The Tennyson Research Bulletin,* 9 (November 2011), 434-44 (p. 436).
[77] Pite, p. xvii.
[78] Perry, 'Hallam and Coleridge', p. 436.
[79] Arthur Henry Hallam, *Remains in Verse and Prose* (London: John Murray, 1862), p. 29 [there are no line numbers in this edition].

In the footnote to the passage Hallam acknowledges that while 'these characters are of course purely ideal' it is still the case that, 'in the composition of the lines, "Methought I saw," & c., my thoughts dwelt almost involuntarily on those few conversations which it is my delight to have held with that "good old man, most eloquent," Samuel Coleridge.' It is Coleridge's talk upon which Hallam focuses.[80]

The influence of Coleridge's talk does not end here, however. Although Coleridge died less than a year after Hallam, some elusive memories of his speech are in their own way immortalised in *In Memoriam*. Notably, Hallam's description of Coleridge as the 'good, old man, | Most eloquent, who spake of things divine' re-appears in *In Memoriam* transformed, with Hallam as the one who 'said of things divine' (XXXVII. 18), but Coleridge also influences other aspects of *In Memoriam* (as I will examine in the following chapter). Furthermore, the influence of Coleridge, traced through his link to Hallam, is also evident in *Idylls of the King*, both in the figure of Arthur and elsewhere (see Chapter 5).

Through talking to his disciples, Coleridge was able to create a presence, and imagine an afterlife. Through talking to them he could ensure that he would be remembered. Babbage's theory (that talk, once released from the mouth and the body, is forever recorded in the air) would be published shortly after Coleridge's death. Yet, for Coleridge, the focus was on the ephemerality or permanence of talk in relation to other people, on whether he had, through his talk, created 'a thousand Things that exist in the minds of others'. By talking to his disciples, and 'putting into their Heart the same continuousness', he could attempt both to find continuity through others and to create a sense of 'ontological security'.

[80] In 'Hallam and Coleridge,' Perry gives more detail regarding Hallam's influence by Coleridge, and his 'purposeful attempt to master a Coleridgean manner and vocabulary' (p. 439).

CHAPTER 4

‘Breathing thro’ his lips’: reciprocal revivification in *In Memoriam*

> Ah yet, ev’n yet, if this might be,
> I, falling on his faithful heart,
> Would breathing thro’ his lips impart
> The life that almost dies in me;
>
> That dies not, but endures with pain,
> And slowly forms the firmer mind,
> Treasuring the look it cannot find,
> The words that are not heard again. (XVIII. 13-20)

At the centre of *In Memoriam* is a body that is no longer breathing and a person who is uncomfortably aware that he still is; yet *In Memoriam* is also about a reciprocal breathing relationship. Tennyson uses the poem to breathe life into Hallam, paradoxically to attempt to bring him back to life but also to move him onwards to the next life. As well as breathing him onwards to immortality in death, he also attempts to secure him immortality in poetry by breathing life into his memory. At the same time, Hallam is ‘breathing thro’ [Tennyson’s] lips’ too; his voice is heard in imagination and quotation, and at times it is his words that re-inspire Tennyson to continue bringing him back to life. Tennyson wrestles with the temptation to become a ventriloquist for the dead Hallam: he wishes to allow him to speak, but he is also uneasy about the propriety of speaking for the dead.

The facts are well known. In the autumn of 1833, Tennyson’s close friend from Cambridge, Arthur Hallam, died of a cerebral haemorrhage in Vienna at the age of twenty-two. Hallam, who had been engaged to Tennyson’s sister, Emily, had been a favourite among his friends and the Tennyson family. Tennyson’s own subsequent grief was channelled into numerous poems, most notably a lengthy series of short lyrics

which would become *In Memoriam*. Published to great acclaim in 1850, seventeen years after Hallam's death, *In Memoriam* is made up of 133 sections, and would become a symbol of mourning in the second half of the nineteenth century.[1]

Both ventriloquism and resuscitation contain, in relation to *In Memoriam*, contrary movements. In each case, Tennyson gives or breathes life into Hallam, but he also tries to allow Hallam to speak his own words. This contrariness reflects the paradox of grief and mourning that elegy attempts to express. Stephen Regan observes that 'elegy is founded on paradox and contradiction. It needs to remember the dead, but it also needs to forget them.'[2] *In Memoriam* embodies this paradoxical attempt to move forward – 'move on' – while simultaneously attempting to look back.[3] Seamus Perry states that, 'if each *In Memoriam* stanza begins with expectation, it soon relapses again into recollection – the texture is self-enfolding, as though seeking to protect a memory of Hallam […] from change'.[4] There is a tension in *In Memoriam* between a need for circularity and a drive to move forward. This sense of moving forward and circling back is part of mourning and grieving, and of elegy in general; there is a wish to hold onto grief and its link to the memory of the person, whilst at the same time wanting to be able to move beyond it and to allow the dead to move beyond as well. This is evident in the architectural structure of *In Memoriam* and the ABBA form of the stanzas. It is evident, too, in Tennyson's particular engagement with forms of

[1] Queen Victoria is said to have told Tennyson, shortly after the death of her husband that: 'next to the Bible *In Memoriam* is my comfort' (quoted by Robert H. Ross in his Norton Critical Edition of *In Memoriam*: *In Memoriam,* ed. by Robert H. Ross (London: Norton, 1973), p. 100); although published as a complete poem, the sections were all written at different times throughout the seventeen years, and not in the order in which they were published. I read *In Memoriam* as a whole, complete poem, but one that has been redesigned as such.
[2] Stephen Regan, 'Elegy', in *Thinking About Almost Everything: New Ideas to Light up Minds*, ed. by Ash Amin and Michael O'Neill (London: Profile Books, 2009), pp. 26-29 (p. 26).
[3] See: Seamus Perry, 'Elegy', in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman and Antony H. Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 115-33 (p. 119), and Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) p. 168.
[4] Perry, 'Elegy', p. 119.

resuscitation and ventriloquism, which reflect and emphasise this paradox of circular and forward movement.

Resuscitation

The quotation with which I began, from Section XVIII of *In Memoriam,* raises complex questions about the possibility of reviving the dead and what this might actually mean. The image of the poet 'breathing thro'' his dead friend's 'lips' is one of resuscitation: the living Tennyson imagines himself 'falling' upon the dead Hallam's 'heart' and 'breathing' into Hallam's lips his own breath. Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation was one of the major methods introduced by the Royal Humane Society, from 1774 onwards, to reanimate the apparently dead (as discussed in Chapter 1). I do not suggest that Tennyson is directly referencing the developments and theories of the Royal Humane Society; however, the idea of breathing into an apparently dead person's mouth to attempt to restore them to life had entered into public consciousness well before the 1830s.[5]

In 'breathing thro' his lips,' Tennyson imagines himself giving breath to a friend who no longer has it. However, it is notable that this action does not seem to come easily to him. He imagines himself attempting to 'impart | The life that almost dies' in him, suggesting both a psychological struggle with the effects of grief, and also a physical difficulty breathing, as though he is attempting to breathe into Hallam but is unable to expel enough air. This sense of constriction may be partly informed by the real physical difficulty of breathing during deep grief (as discussed in Chapter 3), also suggested by the 'labouring breast' in XV. 18; it is surely also due to an uncomfortable awareness of still being alive by contrast with the dead Hallam. The effect of a death on

[5] As outlined in Chapter 1, resuscitation has a complex history, and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation was not the only method considered; however, it is the most memorable.

the breathing of those still living may be played out in the physicality of a 'labouring breast,' but may also almost take the breath away, as is recalled in Section XX, where a death is shown to affect the way that everyone breathes, including children:

> For by the hearth the children sit
> Cold in that atmosphere of Death,
> And scarce endure to draw the breath,
> Or like to noiseless phantoms flit. (13-16)

The death/breath rhyme, which occurs many times in *In Memoriam*, here serves to emphasise the stark contrast of the living and the dead. Tennyson's near-failure in imagining himself 'imparting' life-giving breath 'thro' [Hallam's] lips', in Section XVIII, is partly a failure in imagining his ability to cross this divide.

The sense of the breath 'almost dying' in Tennyson is particularly notable as Tennyson's own excellent lungs meant that he actually had a lot of breath to give. Eric Griffiths, in *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry,* has written extensively about Tennyson's physical breath and the effect that his lung power had on the lines and patterns of *In Memoriam*. Tennyson frequently performed *In Memoriam* out loud, and relied on his immense breath for these performances: as Griffiths observes, he 'thought that nobody had lungs like him.'[6] As with Coleridge's work, Tennyson's poetry attends to the specific breath of the poet who will speak this poetry out loud, and the absence of strength of breath at this moment emphasises the debilitating effect of grief on him. The sense is complete at 'the life that almost dies in me,' as demonstrated by the terminal punctuation of the semicolon, but then the next clause and stanza revive and qualify it. Tennyson's sense and sentence 'almost dies' there, but then 'dies not.' The suggestion of 'almost' dying is entangled with hints of revival. 'The life that almost dies in me' might also convey a trace of the fading of Hallam in his memory – he is fading, but Tennyson determines not to allow this to happen. By breathing into Hallam, Tennyson

[6] Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) pp. 106-8.

is resuscitating a memory of him, making sure that he is created and recreated in the poet's own memory and in the poetry. Hallam might have died physically, but he will not be allowed to disappear entirely.

In these stanzas Tennyson offers the possibility that he might be able to pull Hallam back from the brink of death, but also the idea that, by breathing into him, he is breathing him onward to another life. If Hallam were to be able to be brought back to life, he would re-join the breathing world in which Tennyson still lives. However, at a number of points in *In Memoriam,* Tennyson also describes the afterlife in terms of breathing. In LXII, Hallam 'breathes a novel world', paradoxically after he has stopped being able to breathe physically (9). Similarly, in CXVIII Tennyson asks the reader to 'trust that those we call the dead | Are breathers of an ampler day' (5-6). In relation to CXVIII, Shatto and Shaw note: 'with this traditional idea of the atmosphere in the spiritual world, Bradley compares *Aeneid*, VI 640: "Largior hic campos aether" ("Here the air they breathe is freer and more enlarged"), and Wordsworth, "Laodamia", 105: "An ampler ether, a diviner air".'[7] By placing Hallam so firmly within a classical and recent canonical tradition (as well as in to the Christian afterlife), Tennyson positions him within an immortal tradition of breathing poetry: he breathes him onwards and into the canon.

*

There is also something visceral about Tennyson imagining himself 'falling on [Hallam's] faithful heart' and 'breathing thro' his lips.' Although it has Biblical precedents (Christopher Ricks compares the story of Elisha in II Kings 4. 34: 'And he went up, and lay upon the child, and his hands upon his hands; and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm'), it is also difficult entirely to

[7] *IM*, p. 274.

ignore the erotic overtones, especially when taken in the context of unpublished sections of *In Memoriam*.[8] Hallam is the literary inspiration for *In Memoriam*, and was also considered during the writing process to be someone who literally inspired; a cancelled stanza from Section XCVII offers an image in which the breath is shared between the two friends:

> They madly drank each other's breath
> With breast to breast in early years
> They met with passion and with tears,
> Their every parting was a death.[9]

This stanza was originally intended for a section in which Tennyson imagines the depth of his grief for Hallam to be like that of 'two partners of a married life,' reflecting the strength of their friendship (XCVII. 5). There is intense intimacy in this memory of sharing the breath, something that has come out of the cavity of the body and is taken into the body of someone else. It is almost an image of becoming drunk on each other's breath through the drinking of it. Their mouths must be close enough to take in each other's breath, and they are, in fact, both literally sharing their breath and also presumably feeling the movement of breath inside each other's chest (they are 'breast to breast'). In this stanza there also lingers something of the 'two fair creatures' in Keats's 'Ode to Psyche', who 'lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass; | Their arms embraced', and whose 'lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu, | […] And ready still past kisses to outnumber' (9; 15-16; 17-19).[10] This image of the two mouths close together in this cancelled stanza from *In Memoriam*, the breath passing between them,

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[8] *TP,* II, 337n; The Ancient Greek idea of pederastic inspiration is figured in terms of the breath – the Spartan term for the elder lover, *eispnelas*, literally means 'breathing into' (see William Armstrong Percy III, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), pp. 73-89, and Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: the Ancien Régime in Classical Greece*, 3 vols (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), I, 140)).

[9] Quoted in *IM*, pp. 114-15n.

[10] Keats, *Poems,* pp. 364-65.

persists in the published poem in the wish to breathe 'thro' [Hallam's] lips,' and to revive him with this breath. We may think of this as a 'kiss of life'.

The term 'kiss of life' to refer to mouth-to-mouth resuscitation emerged in 1961, coined in the *Daily Mail*.[11] Yet, even though it is anachronistic to think of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation explicitly as a 'kiss of life' in the early nineteenth century, the 1961 term likely draws on a long cultural history of some association between the two. Luke Davidson argues that it is a useful concept, due to the connection of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to 'kisses of life' in literature: 'the reviving kiss is an emotionally charged moment celebrated in innumerable stories within Western European culture from the ancient Greeks to the present day. Just think of Sleeping Beauty. Kissing has long been associated with animation, redemption and renewal.'[12] Davidson also refers to Ann Pasternak Slater's examination of the dying kiss on the Early Modern stage, in *Shakespeare the Director*.[13] Pasternak Slater offers examples from Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and *2 Tamburlaine*, as well as Shakespeare's *3 Henry VI*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *2 Henry VI*, the last of which I quote below:

> To haue thee with thy lippes to stop my mouth:
> So should'st thou eyther turne my flying soule,
> Or I should breathe it so into thy body,
> And then it liu'd in sweete Elizium. (*2 Henry VI,* III. 2. 2105ff)[14]

She suggests that in the plays of Shakespeare (and Marlowe), the dying are kissed for specific reasons: 'either to restore life ("So should'st thou eyther turne my flying soule"), or to end it in a mutual mingling ("Or I should breathe it so into thy body")' which then 'transports the beloved to a better world ("And then it liu'd in sweete Elizium")'.[15]

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[11] 'kiss, n', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 22 February 2018].
[12] Davidson, 'The Kiss of Life,' p.100.
[13] Ann Pasternak Slater, *Shakespeare the Director* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp. 79-100.
[14] Quoted in Pasternak Slater, pp. 92.
[15] Pasternak Slater, p. 92.

Tennyson, in his vision of 'breathing thro' [Hallam's] lips', implicitly mingles the literary and the scientific: the Shakespearean kiss of life and the recent recommendations for mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. This also offers an explanation for cancelling the stanza from XCVII. It may have been too personal and too erotic, but also, perhaps, simply did not fit with the final narrative of *In Memoriam* in which the poet is both breathing into Hallam and breathing him onward. The focus of the stanza is on the way that Hallam and Tennyson breathed with each other in life, and this is a way of thinking about their breathing together that Tennyson subsequently moved beyond. In the final version of *In Memoriam* he starts to move towards a breathing into and onward of the other, rather than simply remembering how he once breathed with. As Pasternak Slater reads the dying kiss in Shakespeare's plays, so the 'kiss of life' that Tennyson gives to Hallam is both to 'restore life' and to 'transport the beloved to a better world': by 'breathing thro' his lips,' Tennyson is both holding onto him (how he was), and letting him go (onwards).

*

Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation was one of the major methods introduced by the Royal Humane Society to revive not just the dead, but specifically the drowned. *In Memoriam* is full of images of both figurative and literal drowning, particularly during the 'Fair Ship' sequence from Section IX (1). There are already suggestions of drowning prior to Section IX, from the early intention to 'let Love clasp Grief lest both be drown'd' (I. 9), to the vignettes of loss in Section VI in which a 'mother' prays for the safety of her 'sailor' at sea while his 'heavy-shotted hammock-shroud | Drops in his vast and wandering grave' (VI. 13-16), or a girl waits at home while 'her future lord' is, perhaps, 'drown'd in passing thro' the ford' (VI. 25-40). From Section IX, the journey of the 'Fair ship' bearing the body is charted from Europe back to England, but

throughout this runs the anxiety that the sea may yet overwhelm them, leaving Hallam's body beneath the waves:

> So bring him; we have idle dreams:
> This look of quiet flatters thus
> Our home-bred fancies. O to us,
> The fools of habit, sweeter seems
>
> To rest beneath the clover sod,
> That takes the sunshine and the rains,
> Or where the kneeling hamlet drains
> The chalice of the grapes of God;
>
> Than if with thee the roaring wells
> Should gulf him fathom-deep in brine;
> And hands so often clasp'd in mine,
> Should toss with tangle and with shells. (X. 9-20)

There is a sense of unrest about drowning, of things being unfinished or incomplete; being 'toss[ed]' at sea is in jarring juxtaposition with 'rest[ing]' in the earth. This is partly due to the fact that the dead body is literally moving, 'toss[ing]' in the waves, rather than lying still 'beneath the clover sod.' According to John D. Rosenberg, Tennyson here expresses 'an anxiety so deeply displaced that it would rather imagine Hallam suffering a second death by drowning at sea than dwell upon his actual death in a Vienna hotel room'.[16] Of course, Hallam was already known to be dead, and it was his body that was being transported by sea (and therefore only his already-dead body that might be 'gulf[ed …] fathom-deep in brine'), but the suggestion of drowning remains: the turmoil of the 'roaring wells' mirrors the turmoil of emotions in grief. Furthermore, by figuratively drowning Hallam's body 'fathom-deep in brine,' Tennyson paradoxically offers the trace of a possibility of resuscitation.[17] The drowned body, when lost at sea, cannot be verified as definitely dead as it cannot be seen or examined. The possibility that it may yet resurface, and possibly even survive, remains,

[16] John D. Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age: The Presence of the Past in Victorian Literature* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), p. 34.
[17] See, also, Revelations 20. 13 ('And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works').

especially if an apparently drowned body might be able to be reanimated with someone else's breath.

The image of being buried at sea also focuses on the physicality of Hallam's body beneath the waves, recalling other drowned bodies in literature. Once again, Tennyson merges the literary and the scientific in his approach to writing about Hallam. *Richard III*'s Clarence has a dream of drowning in which he falls 'overboard | Into the tumbling billows of the main,' sees 'a thousand men that fishes gnawed upon' and observes the way that their dead bodies have begun to intermingle with the 'unvalued jewels | All scatter'd in the bottom of the sea' (I. 4. 19-28).[18] In *The Tempest*, Ariel sings of 'bones' becoming 'coral' and 'eyes' making way for 'pearls' (I. 2. 400-1).[19] The 'sea-change', that others the known body lying 'Full fathom five' in *The Tempest* (I. 2. 403; 399), lingers in the background of Hallam's dead 'hands' tossing 'with tangle and with shells' somewhere 'fathom-deep in brine'. The most important allusion, though, is to *Lycidas,* which highlights the elegiac heritage of *In Memoriam*. Following the death by drowning of John Milton's school friend, Edward King, in *Lycidas* Milton returns again and again to the image of the 'remorseless deep' closing 'o'er the head' of Lycidas (50; 51). More specifically, he presents the image of the 'bones' of Lycidas being 'hurled' somewhere under the 'sounding seas' and 'whelming tide' (154-57), as Hallam is here imagined to be gulfed 'fathom-deep in brine' by the 'roaring wells,' his dead 'hands' being 'tossed' with 'shells' and seaweed.[20]

In the following section the focus remains on Hallam's body being 'tossed' by the waves, but turns specifically to his lack of breath, embodied by the 'dead calm in that noble breast | Which heaves but with the heaving deep' (XI. 19-20). The breast

[18] Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, pp. 183-222.
[19] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, pp. 1221-43.
[20] *John Milton: The Major Works,* ed. by Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 40; 43.

usually ‘heaves’ with breath, with the inflation of the lungs as the air rushes in and out (this relationship between the expanding and contracting ‘breast’ and the ‘breath’ that fills it is emphasised here by the aural and visual similarly of the words). In this image, though, the breast is no longer heaving with breath, but with the movement of the waves. The breast is appearing to move, in accordance with an external movement, but this is only illusory as inside the chest there is ‘dead calm’ – the only movement is now outside the body. The image of Hallam’s ‘noble breast’ recalls the cancelled stanza from XCVII in which the friends ‘madly drank each other’s breath | With breast to breast’. Of the two ‘breasts’ that had once been close enough intimately to share breath, one is imagined now to be moving only ‘with the heaving deep’, while the other becomes the ‘labouring breast’ in XV, wracked and overwhelmed by grief.

Following the contrasting attitudes towards the possibility of ‘rest beneath the clover sod’ or being gulfed ‘fathom-deep in brine’ to ‘toss with tangle and with shells’ in Section X, Tennyson focuses on Hallam’s actual burial-place:

> The Danube to the Severn gave
> The darken’d heart that beat no more;
> They laid him by the pleasant shore,
> And in the hearing of the wave.
>
> There twice a day the Severn fills;
> The salt sea-water passes by,
> And hushes half the babbling Wye,
> And makes a silence in the hills.
>
> The Wye is hush’d nor moved along,
> And hush’d my deepest grief of all,
> When fill’d with tears that cannot fall,
> I brim with sorrow drowning song.
>
> The tide flows down, the wave again
> Is vocal in its wooded walls;
> My deeper anguish also falls,
> And I can speak a little then. (XIX. 1-16)

Hallam was buried in the family vault in the Church of St Andrew in Clevedon, overlooking the River Severn. Although he was buried on land, the focus remains on the proximity of his burial-site to the sea: he is 'by the pleasant shore, | And in the hearing of the wave'. Later, in Section XXXVI, the rhyme of grave/wave again foregrounds the idea of drowning at sea, recalling Hallam's actual burial-place and the anguished waiting for his remains to arrive by ship:

> Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
> Or builds the house, or digs the grave,
> And those wild eyes that watch the wave
> In roarings round the coral reef. (XXXVI. 13-16)

That 'wave' that roars 'round the coral reef' is uncomfortably close to being a 'grave,' just as Hallam's own grave is uncomfortably close to the sea. Section XIX follows from the suggestions of resuscitation in Section XVIII, in which the poet imagines 'breathing thro'' his dead friend's lips to 'impart | The life that almost dies' in him, and falls at the end of several sections which figuratively drown Hallam's body.

In Section XIX this suggestion of drowning has been externalised and transferred from Hallam's body to the landscape in which his body reposes; the estuary fills with salt water with each flood tide, hushing 'half the babbling Wye' and creating a 'silence in the hills' as it does so. As is fitting considering the recurring circularity in this poem, though, with the paradoxical pushing forward and turning back, this deathly 'silence' is lifted again with the ebb tide and the 'wave again | Is vocal in its wooded walls.' There is an inevitability about the tide that washes in and out again twice each day, like the poet's expectation of returning grief. Although the 'salt sea-water' is already an implicit reference to the poet's salt 'tears,' the reference to his own grief as 'drowning' his 'song' foregrounds the word 'drowning' once more in the reader's awareness. While the primary meaning is that the poet's 'sorrow' drowns his 'song,' making it difficult or even impossible for him to continue to 'sing,' there is also the

alternative suggestion that the song may itself be 'sorrow-drowning, that it may have the effect of 'drowning' sorrow, of somehow overwhelming it and dispatching it. Section XIX, which enacts the difficulty of writing at all when one is early in the grieving process, offers both conditions:

> The tide flows down, the wave again
> Is vocal in its wooded walls;
> My deeper anguish also falls,
> And I can speak a little then.

By breathing his grief into the poem, Tennyson finds it is no longer so overwhelming in his life. As Perry states,

> one of the abiding themes of the poem is the dismal proximity of time's power to heal with its inducement to forget – the thought that any reduction in the immensity of loss would be a disloyalty: 'O grief, can grief be changed to less?' (lxxviii.16)[21]

Of course, this possibility of moving beyond the grief has in it a fear of disloyalty to the lost friend, which is why it must remain at this point simply a secondary suggestion, rather than the primary sense of the lines.

Breathing Hallam on

As the waters on which the ship bearing Hallam's body sailed are conflated with the tears of those grieving for him, so the breezes that filled the sails of that ship to drive it towards England are united with the breaths of those waiting for his body at home, praying that it will be returned quickly and safely. In Section XVII, while Tennyson still waits for Hallam's body to arrive over the sea, he imagines himself helping to speed up the arrival by mingling his own breath, breathed out in a 'prayer' for swift arrival, with the breeze that physically drives the ship:

> Thou comest, much wept for: such a breeze
> Compell'd thy canvas, and my prayer

[21] Seamus Perry, *Alfred Tennyson* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2005), p. 135.

Was as the whisper of an air
To breathe thee over lonely seas. (XVII. 1-4)

Tennyson's 'prayer' here is externalised as a physical thing, highlighting a correlation between his own breath and the atmospheric breeze. He is able to invest his breath with agency so that he can become part of Hallam's movement across the waters. His breath can prevent Hallam from being abandoned in the middle of the ocean alone: by 'breathing [him] over lonely seas,' Tennyson is helping him to move onward (towards home and towards the next life) and is also there with him during the process. Shatto and Shaw note that Sections XIV and XVII particularly are a 'type of *prosphonetikon*, or speech of welcome to a traveller who has just arrived [….] The speech is addressed to the ship, but the subject is Arthur Hallam.'[22]

This moment is also reminiscent of the breathing wind in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which breathed on the mariner alone when he was left in isolation in the middle of the ocean. On his journey to Malta, Coleridge repeatedly described the sails of the Speedwell as 'bellying' when filled with wind, suggesting something alive and anthropomorphic.[23] Yet, like a person who is only alive when breathing and filling their body with air, the sails only come alive in this way when filled by the wind. At this moment in *In Memoriam* it is the wind that revives the sails, as it is Tennyson's breath that revives Hallam; and these two are purposely conflated. Additionally, the secondary meaning of canvas as a blank page reminds the reader that Tennyson is also breathing life into Hallam in the poem.[24] Like the protagonist of the *Ancient Mariner,* Tennyson needs to keep telling his story, but unlike the mariner, Tennyson hopes to resuscitate the dead with his storytelling.

[22] *IM*, p. 117.
[23] *CN,* II, 2012; 2061.
[24] 'canvas, n.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 20 May 2018].

The sense of breathing Hallam onward is extended in Section XL, which posits that we should try not to imagine the dead as dead (and gone completely) but more like children who have grown up and moved on to the next chapter in their lives:

> Could we forget the widow'd hour
> And look on Spirits breathed away,
> As on a maiden in the day
> When first she wears her orange-flower! (XL. 1-4)

This, Tennyson suggests, should be considered as a positive move, even if it is difficult for those left behind. The daughter might 'take her latest leave of home' in order to be married, but this ought to be a happy thing because she 'enters other realms of love' (XL. 6; 12). Her father and mother must let her go so that she can live her life beyond the childhood home, just as we are urged to consider the dead as though they too are being sent forward to a greater life. The dead have not been spirited away to nothing (although there is the suggestion of this in the line, 'Spirits breathed away'), but they have had new and different life 'breathed' into them, as Tennyson attempts to do for Hallam.[25] Later in Section XL Tennyson accentuates this analogy:

> And doubtless, unto thee is given
> A life that bears immortal fruit
> In those great offices that suit
> The full-grown energies of heaven.
>
> [….]
>
> But thou and I have shaken hands,
> Till growing winters lay me low;
> My paths are in the fields I know,
> And thine in undiscover'd lands. (XL. 17-20; 29-32)

Hallam has, Tennyson hopes, been granted 'a life that bears immortal fruit' and Tennyson has had to surrender to the reality that Hallam is not going to return to him. He has 'shaken hands' with Hallam until the time of his own death when 'growing

[25] The phrase 'spirited away' had long been in use by the time that Tennyson was writing: see 'spirit, v', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 2 October 2018].

winters lay [him] down,' and he must acknowledge Hallam's move into a different realm from the one in which he is still living.

The idea of allowing, and even assisting, the dead to 'move' onwards is returned to in Section LXV, but this time balanced by the role that Hallam might also play in this act of resuscitation:

> And in that solace can I sing,
> Till out of painful phases wrought
> There flutters up a happy thought
> Self-balanced on a lightsome wing:
>
> Since we deserved the name of friends,
> And thine effect so lives in me,
> A part of mine may live in thee
> And move thee on to noble ends. (LXV. 5-12)

This once again offers a version of Tennyson breathing Hallam onwards, but Hallam's part in this is also important. Tennyson sings into Hallam and of him, both 'mov[ing him] on' to an immortal life, and also making him immortal in the poem. Hallam's 'effect' on Tennyson is such that he hopes to have a similar 'effect' on Hallam, to help him 'move' onwards (just as Tennyson will need to 'move […] on' in his grief for Hallam). Once again, this section recalls the cancelled stanza from Section XCVII, in which the poet and his friend 'madly drank each other's breath' in a reciprocal breathing relationship, but now it has 'move[d]' forward. That image was intimate but internalised, the breath of the two friends circling from one to the other and back again unproductively. The intimacy remains in Section LXV, but in this instance it also has an outward and forward drive. The relationship is still reciprocal, but it is also productive; Tennyson harnesses the 'effect' of Hallam that is still living in him to be able to 'move [Hallam] on to noble ends.'

‘The words that are not heard again’

Tennyson’s desire to breathe ‘thro’ [Hallam’s] lips’ so as to ‘move [him] on to noble ends’ is also a way of making sure that Hallam’s words are ‘heard again’. Throughout *In Memoriam,* Tennyson experiments with ways of allowing Hallam to speak, whilst avoiding simply becoming a ventriloquist for his dead friend. Ventriloquism, as outlined in Chapter 1, is, in plain terms, when someone pretends not to be speaking (or making sounds), but actually is the agent of the speech or sounds that those observing can hear. The ventriloquist makes the audience think that the voice or sound comes from somewhere else (e.g. a dummy, the air, the chimney, the dead), rather than from them. I posit that in *In Memoriam* Tennyson’s intention is not to ventriloquize Hallam, but to create a space in which Hallam’s voice can be ‘heard again’. This does not prove simple, and he hesitates and doubts his ability to allow Hallam’s voice to be heard.

The challenge for Tennyson is partly that Hallam’s own speech, like Coleridge’s, was considered to be so inimitable during his life, and remembered in even more glowing terms after his death. In LXXXVII Tennyson recalls the experience of watching and hearing Hallam talking:

> And last the master-bowman, he,
> Would cleave the mark. A willing ear
> We lent him. Who, but hung to hear
> The rapt oration flowing free
>
> From point to point, with power and grace
> And music in the bounds of law,
> To those conclusions when we saw
> The God within him light his face,
>
> And seem to lift the form, and glow
> In azure orbits heavenly-wise;
> And over those ethereal eyes
> The bar of Michael Angelo. (LXXXVII. 29-40)

Within this elegy that is constantly questioning the use and bounds of language (especially poetic language), this is, conversely, a description of highly successful

language. The enjambment between the two stanzas – 'The rapt oration flowing free | From point to point' – visually represents the free and wide-ranging nature of Hallam's speech, yet the phrase itself ('point to point') suggests that his talk also had focus and structure. The reader witnesses Hallam's apparently God-like ability to harness rhetoric and construct his argument in a description that is unsurprisingly hyperbolic, as it is the memory of what Hallam's friends (as undergraduates) thought. His speech, which his friends associated with the divine in his lifetime, has gained an impossible grace in death and memory. Tennyson recalls that, 'Thy converse drew us with delight' (CX. 1), and lists the effect that Hallam's talk had on others:

> The stern were mild when thou wert by,
> The flippant put himself to school
> And heard thee, and the brazen fool
> Was soften'd, and he knew not why. (CX. 9-12)

Hallam was apparently able to influence others through his talk, and the lament that, amongst other things, he was to have been 'a potent voice of Parliament', is a reminder of the possibilities that had been lost by his death (CXIII. 11). Shatto and Shaw state that, 'Hallam was a celebrated speaker and conversationalist,' noting recollections from friends including James Spedding, who 'recalled Hallam's "natural skill in the dazzling fence of rhetoric"', and John Kemble, who described the '"magnificent conversation"' of Tennyson and Hallam.[26] Through talking, Hallam appears divine (a 'God within him'), as though he himself is channelling God, akin to the 'divine' words of Coleridge (as discussed at the end of the previous chapter).[27] This is the talk that Tennyson struggles to mimic or revivify.

Hallam's speech and the way to speak about him once he was no longer speaking are concerns that trouble Tennyson, and throughout the poem he addresses the

[26] *IM*, p. 245.
[27] 'Divine' is a word used multiple times in *In Memoriam* in relation to Hallam, notably in sections XXXVII, LXIV, and CXXIX.

need to continue to speak and to allow the dead to continue to speak. In Jacques Derrida's *The Work of Mourning* (an anthology of Derrida's various written and spoken responses to the deaths of friends who had lived in the public eye) a recurring theme is the need to speak about the dead, but not to override them or drown them out with speech. In a letter to Francine Loreau in 1991, on the death of her husband Max Loreau the previous year, Derrida states that he cannot find the 'right words' to express how he feels and what he wants to say, and continues:

> This being at a loss also has to do with a duty: to let the friend speak, to turn speech over to him, his speech, and especially not to take it from him, not to take it in his place – no offense seems worse at the death of a friend (and I already feel I have fallen prey to it) – to allow him to speak, to occupy his silence or to take up speech oneself only in order, if this is possible, to give it back to him.

Derrida cannot find the 'right words' partly as he is inhibited by the overwhelming sense of 'duty' to 'let the friend speak' and 'not to take [his speech] from him'. One particular point that Derrida keeps coming back to in the writings that make up *The Work of Mourning* is the need to allow the dead to have their own voice within the flood of Derrida's mourning. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas point out in their introduction to *The Work of Mourning* that 'Derrida cites in every one of these texts the words of the dead – and often at length,' and very often, it is the last words that he leaves to the dead. For example, in the address at Yale University, during a memorial ceremony for Paul de Man in 1984, he ended by reading out loud from the last letter that he had received from de Man, noting that, 'You'll hear a voice and a tone that are familiar to us'. Reading out the text he prepared for Louis Althusser's funeral in 1990, he stated, 'I wish now to turn it over to him, to let him speak,' and in his 'demi-mot' for Joseph N. Riddel in 1991, he ended by quoting the words of the dead Riddel, stating, 'to conclude, I would like to leave or give back the word to Joe – his words'. In the

letter to Francine Loreau, Derrida once again turns to the letters as a way to revive the voice of the dead friend:

> I am also rereading some of his letters, so numerous and so beautiful. I hesitate to quote from them […] and yet I want to let him have the last word here. How to let him have the last word and yet speak of him, of him alone?[28]

Tennyson experiments with different ways of bringing Hallam's speech into *In Memoriam*, although he is plagued with doubt and hesitation. Like Derrida over a century later, Tennyson attempts to find a way to allow Hallam to speak but does not quite want to ventriloquize him.[29] In Section LXXXV he offers an imagined conversation between himself and the dead Hallam (beginning with the imagined Hallam speaking):

> 'I watch thee from the quiet shore;
> Thy spirit up to mine can reach;
> But in dear words of human speech
> We two communicate no more.'
>
> And I, 'Can clouds of nature stain
> The starry clearness of the free?
> How is it? Canst thou feel for me
> Some painless sympathy with pain?'
>
> And lightly does the whisper fall:
> 'Tis hard for thee to fathom this;
> I triumph in conclusive bliss,
> And that serene result of all.'
>
> So hold I commerce with the dead;
> Or so methinks the dead would say;
> Or so shall grief with symbols play
> And pining life be fancy-fed. (LXXXV. 81-96)

[28] Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, ed. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 94; 95; 21; 74; 118; 127; 132; 100.

[29] This preoccupation becomes a prominent theme in numerous later elegies. Many of Thomas Hardy's *Poems of 1912-13* experiment with different ways of giving voice to or withholding voice from the dead Emma. See, particularly: 'The Haunter', 'The Phantom Horsewoman', 'The Voice', and 'After a Journey' (*The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Samuel Hynes, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), I, 47-70). In Seamus Heaney's *Station Island* (1984) the poet encounters, among other ghosts from his past, his cousin Colum McCartney, whom he had elegized fourteen years previously in 'The Strand at Lough Beg', and who now bitterly accuses him: 'You were there with poets when you got the word | and stayed there with them | [….] and saccharined my death with morning dew' (Seamus Heaney, *Station Island* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 83).

This section is the closest that Tennyson comes to ventriloquism in *In Memoriam*. Tennyson imagines Hallam's side of a shared dialogue and offers it as though it were Hallam's own speech. Speech marks are used, and words imagined to be said, but, paradoxically, Hallam is telling Tennyson that he can no longer communicate 'in dear words of human speech'; it is clear that these cannot really be Hallam's words. This implied conversation is central to Tennyson's anxiety in *In Memoriam*: he needs to hear Hallam, to give him voice, but at the same time knows there is no possibility of this. Hallam has no breath anymore as he no longer has a body, and he has no new words as he is no longer living. Even with this knowledge, Tennyson allows himself to hope, or to imagine, the materiality of a 'whisper' as it 'lightly falls'. However, the final stanza quoted reveals the self-deception of this 'speech,' as the stanza spirals downwards from dialogue to 'fancy-fed' loneliness, through the cumulative realisations of how baseless is this imaginary 'commerce with the dead'.

Four sections later, Tennyson offers another opportunity for Hallam's voice to speak in the poem, this time in a less obviously appropriative way, and therefore more successfully:

> Nor less it pleased in livelier moods,
> Beyond the bounding hill to stray,
> And break the livelong summer day
> With banquet in the distant woods;
>
> Whereat we glanced from theme to theme,
> Discuss'd the books to love or hate,
> Or touch'd the changes of the state,
> Or threaded some Socratic dream;
>
> But if I praised the busy town,
> He loved to rail against it still,
> For 'ground in yonder social mill
> We rub each other's angles down,
>
> 'And merge,' he said, 'in form and gloss
> The picturesque of man and man.'
> We talk'd: the stream beneath us ran,

The wine-flask lying couch'd in moss,

Or cool'd within the glooming wave;
And last, returning from afar,
Before the crimson-circled star
Had fall'n into her father's grave,

And brushing ankle-deep in flowers,
We heard behind the woodbine veil
The milk that bubbled in the pail,
And buzzings of the honied hours. (LXXXIX. 29-52)

Seemingly based on a memory of picnicking by a stream in summer together, this section appears to quote Hallam directly: '"ground in yonder social mill […] | The picturesque of man and man."' Tennyson has chosen to indicate direct quotation by the use of speech marks rather than paraphrase his apparent memory of Hallam's speech. However, in this instance Hallam's speech is allowed into the poem more subtly than in LXXXV. Griffiths observes that in this section Hallam 'speaks four rhyme-words ("mill", "down", "gloss", "man")' and Tennyson 'writes four rhyme-words ("town", "still", "ran", "moss")', and that while each of their words rhyme with those of the other, none of them rhymes with their own words: 'Tennyson's words and Hallam's words yet rhyme completely with each other here, keeping each other perfect company. Hallam's voice comes to life in Tennyson's verse.'[30] Griffiths here suggests a linguistic closeness in which Tennyson writes and Hallam speaks, and it becomes difficult to separate their voices from each other. Additionally, Hallam's voice comes across as one of the many sounds of the natural world that form a backdrop to this summer picnic, such as the running 'stream,' the 'milk that bubbled in the pail' and the 'buzzings of the honied hours.' In this section he is no longer simply a ventriloquist's dummy or a 'symbol' to be played with, but has become part of the living world that surrounds Tennyson, even if only in memory. This is a sentiment that returns in Section CXXIX,

[30] Griffiths, p. 170.

when Tennyson begins to 'dream a dream of good, | And mingle all the world' with Hallam (11-12), and again in CXXX, when Hallam's 'voice is on the rolling air' and is heard 'where the waters run' (1; 2). In this way Tennyson has, in Derrida's words, 'let the friend speak', and has thus ensured that his words are 'heard again'.

Failure of the breath

Tennyson's attempts to allow Hallam to be 'heard again' are performed against a backdrop of doubt and anxiety about the possibility that his 'work will fail' (LVII. 8). This fear of failure is twofold: firstly, there is a personal concern about how far he may have succumbed to morbid, egocentric grieving (what Sigmund Freud, in 1917, would describe as 'melancholia,' as opposed to the more successful 'work which mourning performs'); and secondly, there is a wider anxiety about whether he has 'wasted breath' by even attempting such an elegy in the context of the huge scientific advances, and religious and philosophical questions, of the nineteenth century (CXX. 1).[31]

Throughout *In Memoriam*, Tennyson struggles with the sense that he cannot fully express in words his mourning for Hallam: at times that the words themselves do not convey the true extent of his mourning ('My words are only words, and moved | Upon the topmost froth of thought', LII. 3-4), at others that he cannot even find any words to utter ('no language but a cry', LIV. 20). The fact that Hallam – the one whose voice and breath have been silenced – had in life been thought of as someone who would go far, particularly through his eloquence, makes this deficiency all the more difficult to accept. The tone of Section LXXV is uneasily defensive, as Tennyson confronts the fact that he must inevitably 'leave' some things 'unsaid' (LXXIV. 10):

[31] 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-74), XIV, 239-60.

I leave thy praises unexpress'd
    In verse that brings myself relief,
    And by the measure of my grief
I leave thy greatness to be guess'd;

What practice howsoe'er expert
    In fitting aptest words to things,
    Or voice the richest-toned that sings,
Hath power to give thee as thou wert?

I care not in these fading days
    To raise a cry that lasts not long,
    And round thee with the breeze of song
To stir a little dust of praise.

Thy leaf has perish'd in the green,
    And, while we breathe beneath the sun,
    The world which credits what is done
Is cold to all that might have been.

So here shall silence guard thy fame;
    But somewhere, out of human view,
    Whate'er thy hands are set to do
Is wrought with tumult of acclaim. (LXXV. 1-20)

The 'breeze of song' in the third stanza quoted recalls XVII. 1-2 ('such a breeze | Compell'd thy canvas'), but here its efficacy is questioned. It asks whether Tennyson's breath will achieve its end of immortalising Hallam in the dual (poetic and spiritual) sense. Tennyson maintains that he does not want this to be just a brief moment of memorialising Hallam, that 'stir[s] a little dust of praise', but implies that he wants to be able to immortalise Hallam with the breath (the 'breeze') of his poem. In case we were in any doubt, Tennyson's own living breath is invoked in the next stanza, as one of those who 'breathe beneath the sun'. However, there remains a question about whether or not Tennyson is being disingenuous here. He is not leaving 'silence [to] guard [Hallam's] fame', but is in fact writing hundreds of lines of poetry to ensure Hallam's fame.

While the primary meaning of 'dust of praise' in this section is a brief smattering of praise, it also evokes Hallam's own 'dust', his physical remains once his

body has disintegrated. Hallam's 'dust' has already been referred to back in the 'Fair Ship' sequence ('The dust of him I shall not see | Till all my widow'd race be run', XVII. 19-20) despite the fact that Hallam's remains would really still have been a body, and nowhere near becoming dust, when on that ship.[32] As 'dust', Hallam seems more distant and less like the person he had been in life, but also, as discussed in Chapter 1, he has disintegrated into something that can be breathed in or blown about. As the nineteenth century progressed there was increasing focus on the fact that dust is made up, in part, of bits of human skin and hair from both the living and the dead, which is constantly being breathed in by the living. Discussing the 'relations between bodies and books' in Victorian literature, Victoria Mills points out that, 'Bibliophiles venerate dust that is formed through the accumulation of cutaneous shedding from both books and men.'[33] In Hallam's 'dust', his physical body may be figuratively mingled with his potential immortality in literature, to be, his elegist fears, breathed away.

Tennyson toys throughout *In Memoriam* with the reality of Hallam's revivification, either in language, in ideas, or even in the flesh. In Section XCII we see him unwilling to accept the idea of Hallam revivified (and speech is important at this moment):

> If any vision should reveal
> Thy likeness, I might count it vain
> As but the canker of the brain;
> Yea, tho' it spake and made appeal
>
> To chances where our lots were cast
> Together in the days behind,
> I might but say, I hear a wind
> Of memory murmuring the past. (XCII. 1-8)

[32] 'Dust' is, of course, a rhetorically conventional way of referring to the (worthless) body as distinct from the soul.
[33] Victoria Mills, '"Books in my Hands – Books in my Heart – Books in my Brain": Bibliomania, the Male Body, and Sensory Erotics in Late-Victorian Literature' in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed by Katharina Boehm (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 130-52 (pp. 130; 141).

Hallam returning would disrupt Tennyson's elegy. This moment of Hallam's potential speech is shut off and silenced before any words or language are actually given to it in the poem itself. The final line and a half ('a wind | Of memory murmuring the past') describe something even less tangible than air, and very far from Hallam's clear speech in LXXXVII. There is a suggestion of something voiced, but it remains unarticulated.

Moving towards the end of *In Memoriam*, Tennyson begins to express an anxiety about the success of the entire project, through a focus on his breath:

> I trust I have not wasted breath:
> I think we are not wholly brain,
> Magnetic mockeries; not in vain,
> Like Paul with beasts, I fought with Death;
>
> Not only cunning casts in clay:
> Let Science prove we are, and then
> What matters Science unto men,
> At least to me? I would not stay. (CXX. 1-8)

He does not want to have wasted breath in the writing of the poem and therefore in immortalising Hallam and his feelings for him, or in the attempt to breathe Hallam towards poetic and spiritual immortality. This anxiety is exacerbated by the concern that spiritual immortality may not even exist; Tennyson decides that he must trust that it is possible to breathe Hallam towards an immortality of the soul, despite new scientific understandings about the history of humanity. Charles Lyell had published *Principles of Geology* in 1830-33; Tennyson had certainly read this work 'during the 1830s', and may have already been reading other writing by Lyell even earlier.[34] Robert Bernard Martin draws attention to the fact that the library with which Tennyson grew up in the

[34] Charles Tennyson, *Alfred Tennyson* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 249; Hallam Tennyson wrote that Tennyson was 'deeply immersed' in *Principles of Geology* in 1837 (Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir,* 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 136, however, Tennyson mentions Lyell in a letter dated 1 November 1836 (Tennyson, *Letters,* I, p. 145), so he is likely to have read it earlier. Dennis Dean has posited that Tennyson may have read two unsigned articles by Lyell in the *Quarterly Review* a decade earlier than this (1826 and 1827), see Dennis R. Dean, *Tennyson and Geology* (Lincoln: Tennyson Society, 1985), pp. 2-5 (there is no clear evidence for this, but Tennyson was a regular reader of the *Quarterly Review*).

Rectory had ‘a collection of some 2,500 books’ including ‘a group of scientific books, which influenced Tennyson in his lifelong amateur passion for science’.[35] The anxiety about having ‘wasted breath’ recalls the concern expressed in LII, that ‘words are only words, and moved | Upon the topmost froth of thought’ (3-4). The concern that his words do not do justice to his ‘large grief’ or to Hallam himself, and that they also may not do their work of moving Hallam onward to immortality, recurs throughout *In Memoriam* (V. 11).

Although Tennyson mourns his inability to ‘communicate’ effectively with the dead Hallam in ‘dear words of human speech’, he also states at other times that they were often able to communicate in life without spoken language. He remembers a connection between them that went beyond words when Hallam was still alive, when each knew what the other was thinking before needing to speak of it. Section XXIII is nostalgic about the memory of these happy times of complete mutual understanding:

> When each in turns was guide to each,
> And Fancy light from Fancy caught,
> And Thought leapt out to wed with Thought
> Ere Thought could wed itself with Speech. (XXIII. 13-16)

The memory here is of two friends able to bypass spoken language so as to communicate without breath, without the physicality of speech, and is revisited in the reciprocal, forward-moving relationship of Section LXV. The fact that they communicate by ‘thought’ more than ‘speech’ in this memory, however, draws attention to the way that words seem to be so important at other times in the poem.

Section XXIII recalls Tennyson’s early sonnet, ‘As when with downcast eyes,’ which recreates a moment of perfect intimacy and understanding between two people:

> As when with downcast eyes we muse and brood,
> And ebb into a former life, or seem
> To lapse far back in some confusèd dream

[35] Robert Bernard Martin, *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart* (London: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 19.

To states of mystical similitude;
If one but speaks or hems or stirs his chair,
Ever the wonder waxeth more and more,
So that we say, 'All this hath been before,
All this hath been, I know not when or where.'
So, friend, when first I looked upon your face,
Our thought gave answer each to each, so true—
Opposèd mirrors each reflecting each—
That though I knew not in what time or place,
Methought that I had often met with you,
And either lived in either's heart and speech.

In this instance, voiced and unvoiced communications are given equal weight; the effect is the same whether 'one but speaks or hems or stirs his chair.' The four instances of 'each' in lines ten and eleven reinforce the sense of reciprocity between the two, and the sonnet can certainly be read as a depiction of an ideal intimate friendship. Yet, positioning the two people as 'Opposèd mirrors each reflecting each' might also suggest that, while they are close enough that their 'heart and speech' are entirely compatible, there may be something slightly limited in the way that Tennyson here chooses to write about their relationship: they reflect and understand each other, but, by simply mirroring each other, there is no space for any forward movement or interaction with the wider world. This sonnet was published in 1832 and I propose that Tennyson moved beyond describing this sort of insular relationship in *In Memoriam*, even though it resurfaces at moments of doubt.

Reciprocal breeze

In Memoriam is permeated by doubt and anxiety, but by comparing the potentially inward-looking relationship found in 'As when with downcast eyes' (or in the cancelled stanza from XCVII) with the memory of a more open and interdependent conversation in LXXXIX ('if I praised the busy town, | He loved to rail against it still', 37-38) it is evident that the elegy offers an opportunity for growth beyond simple mirroring. There

are traces of mirroring and duplication in LXXXIX ('theme to theme', 33; 'man and man', 42), but it is never allowed to be insular: the two friends are part of a wider natural world:

> 'And merge,' he said, 'in form and gloss
> The picturesque of man and man.'
> We talk'd: the stream beneath us ran,
> The wine-flask lying couch'd in moss. (41-44)

As soon as there seems to be a suggestion that they might mirror each other in their talk, the conversation and the stanza is cut through by the 'stream', which runs beneath the interlocutors and through the middle of the stanza, linking them to other times and other places.

In Sections XCI to XCIV, the poet repeatedly hopes for some sort of communication from, or communion with, Hallam but has been anxious as to what that could mean and whether he would even trust it (in XCII he wonders whether some reanimated form of Hallam may need to be dismissed simply as a 'canker of the brain', 3). Section XCV begins on a breezeless evening, characterised by a 'calm that let the tapers burn | Unwavering' (5-6). Once the poet is left alone in the night he is suddenly drawn to re-read Hallam's letters: a 'hunger seized my heart' to read 'the noble letters of the dead' (21; 24). Tennyson does not quote from Hallam's letters, so the reader is only aware of Tennyson's reaction to them, yet the effect that those words have is immense:

> And strangely on the silence broke
> The silent-speaking words, and strange
> Was love's dumb cry defying change
> To test his worth; and strangely spoke
>
> The faith, the vigour, bold to dwell
> On doubts that drive the coward back,
> And keen thro' wordy snares to track
> Suggestion to her inmost cell.
>
> So word by word, and line by line

The dead man touch'd me from the past,
And all at once it seem'd at last
The living soul was flash'd on mine,

And mine in his was wound, and whirl'd
About empyreal heights of thought,
And came on that which is, and caught
The deep pulsations of the world,

Æonian music measuring out
The steps of Time – the shocks of Chance –
The blows of Death. At length my trance
Was cancell'd, stricken thro' with doubt.

Vague words! but ah, how hard to frame
In matter-moulded forms of speech,
Or ev'n for intellect to reach
Thro' memory that which I became:

Till now the doubtful dusk reveal'd
The knolls once more where, couch'd at ease,
The white kine glimmer'd, and the trees
Laid their dark arms about the field;

And suck'd from out the distant gloom
A breeze began to tremble o'er
The large leaves of the sycamore
And fluctuate all the still perfume,

And gathering freshlier overhead,
Rock'd the full-foliaged elms, and swung
The heavy-folded rose, and flung
The lilies to and fro, and said,

'The dawn, the dawn,' and died away;
And East and West, without a breath,
Mixt their dim lights, like life and death,
To broaden into boundless day. (XCV. 25-64)

This is a startling description of the effect that Hallam's 'silent-speaking words' have on Tennyson, and therefore, in turn, on Hallam himself. Hallam's words briefly reanimate him in Tennyson's mind: in a few short lines he turns from a 'dead man' to a 'living soul.' Furthermore, Hallam's 'living soul' does not just reappear, but engages with Tennyson's, which is 'wound' in his and 'whirl'd' together. These images of circularity ('wound', 'whirl'd') reflect the circular relationship between the two friends.

Hallam's words deeply affect Tennyson, and briefly reanimate Hallam for him, giving Tennyson the strength to reanimate Hallam in a more lasting way with his own words.

Although the episode begins on a breezeless evening in a state of deep calm, after Hallam has been brought back by the reading of his own words and has become real to Tennyson again, something seems to shift. Dawn comes, and a rush of wind arrives, momentarily, with the approaching day. This starts as a light breeze, but soon 'rock'd' the great 'full-foliaged elms', and 'swung | The heavy-folded rose' and 'flung | the lilies to and fro'. Finally, having announced the arrival of dawn, the wind dies away again into silence and calm 'without a breath'. Hallam's words unlock both Tennyson and his environment, as is emphasised by the advent of the external wind. They breathe new possibility into him, which he can then breathe back into Hallam. In 'The Correspondent Breeze,' M. H. Abrams describes and examines various instances of the relationship between the literal wind and the metaphorical breath of inspiration, as I have discussed in the introduction to this thesis. The rush of breeze appears to re-inspire Tennyson, to 'sigh' the reviving breath into him (LXXXVI. 9).

There is an arresting episode of a reciprocal interaction with the breeze earlier in the poem, which suggests even more clearly the Romantic 'correspondent breeze'. In Section LXXXVI the poet describes the 'ambrosial air' that rises from the earth in the evening 'after showers', which he asks to 'sigh' into him its 'full new life':

> Sweet after showers, ambrosial air,
> That rollest from the gorgeous gloom
> Of evening over brake and bloom
> And meadow, slowly breathing bare
>
> The round of space, and rapt below
> Thro' all the dewy-tassell'd wood,
> And shadowing down the horned flood
> In ripples, fan my brows and blow
>
> The fever from my cheek, and sigh
> The full new life that feeds thy breath

Throughout my frame, till Doubt and Death,
Ill brethren, let the fancy fly

From belt to belt of crimson seas
On leagues of odour streaming far,
To where in yonder orient star
A hundred spirits whisper 'Peace.' (LXXXVI. 1-16)

The poet asks the earth to blow its 'ambrosial air' onto and into him, so as to revive him, to take his fever away, and blow 'full new life' 'throughout [his] frame.' Shatto and Shaw note that,

> the section forms a single sentence [….] On hearing Allingham recite the poem T. commented (of the first five lines, up to 'The round of space'): 'It all goes together' (Allingham's *Diary*, 328). The implication is that these lines should be read in one breath.[36]

This particular focus on the breath at this moment serves to emphasise Tennyson's psychological and physiological engagement with the 'ambrosial air,' which fills him with the 'full new life' of the world's breath. Shatto and Shaw note Coleridge's 'The Destiny of Nations, A Vision': 'sweet, | As after showers the perfumed gale of eve, | That flings the cool drops on a feverous cheek' (384-86) in relation to lines 1-4 and 9; and, in relation to lines 9-11, Coleridge's 'Fears in Solitude': 'from the breezy air, | Sweet influences trembled o'er his frame' (20-21).[37] I will show that Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* is also influential at this point. In the *Ancient Mariner*, as I have shown in Chapter 2, there is a significant moment near the end, in Part VI, where the mariner feels the wind blowing on him alone:

But soon there breathed a wind on me,
Nor sound nor motion made:
Its path was not upon the sea,
In ripple or in shade.

It raised my hair, it fann'd my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring –
It mingled strangely with my fears,

[36] *IM*, p. 243.
[37] Quoted in *IM*, p. 243; 244.

Yet it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
Yet she sail'd softly too:
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze –
On me alone it blew. (453-64)

The lexis and imagery in *In Memoriam* LXXXVI are redolent of this moment in the *Ancient Mariner*. The 'wind' that 'breathed' on the mariner becomes the 'ambrosial air […] slowly breathing' on Tennyson. The 'ripple' and 'shade' that the wind does not make on the sea in the *Ancient Mariner* become the air 'shadowing down the horned flood | In ripples' in *In Memoriam*. The touch of the wind on the two speakers is very similar: the mariner tells how 'it raised [his] hair, it fann'd [his] cheek', while Tennyson asks the air to 'fan [his] brows and blow | The fever from [his] cheek'. The 'meadow' in the *In Memoriam* section evokes the 'meadow-gale of spring' in the *Ancient Mariner*; and, in fact, the previous section of *In Memoriam* had ended with the word 'Spring', meaning that the memory of that word is still lingering in the mind of the reader as they read the initial lines of Section LXXXVI.[38]

Tennyson seems to me to be picking up on this passage by Coleridge, and on the renovating aspect of 'air-in-motion.'[39] However, he also builds on the trope: he calls on the rejuvenating wind to breathe 'new life' into him, and this is what he is able to use to 'feed [Hallam's] breath' specifically. I mean by this that he uses the physical and figurative inspiration of the wind to resuscitate Hallam in accordance with the contrary motions that I have discussed: both to keep him alive and to move him on. Furthermore, the wind itself seems to have close associations with the breath of the dead Hallam. Tennyson declares in Section C that he finds 'no place that does not

[38] The line 'sweet after showers' suggests the opening line of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* ('Whan that Aprill, with his shoures sote'), reinforcing the impression of spring (Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue*, ed. by V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson (New York: Norton, 2005), p. 3).
[39] Abrams, p. 113.

breathe | Some gracious memory of [his] friend' from 'whispering reed' to 'windy wold' (3-4; 6; 8). Towards the end of the poem, he states that Hallam's 'voice is on the rolling air' (CXXX. 1). The breeze that Tennyson calls upon to 'sigh | The full new life' into him then, and which inspires him to 'breathe' 'thro' [Hallam's] lips,' in an attempt simultaneously to reanimate Hallam and to support him into the next life, is in fact a breeze that already has connotations of Hallam himself. This is in keeping with the recurring focus on circularity and progression in *In Memoriam*: Tennyson expresses the wish to be revived by the wind so that he can keep reviving Hallam, and it is Hallam who is on the wind's breath. Unlike the cancelled stanza from Section XCVII, in which the 'breath' circulates stagnantly from 'breast to breast' between the two friends, this is a greater and more productive motion of the breath, which grows and progresses as it recirculates.

The sense of the two friends breathing together remains in the poem, but on a less literal level, and without the sense of shutting out the world than there was in the cancelled stanza. In XXII, when Tennyson recalls the way that the two friends lived side by side, a trace lingers of those friends who 'madly drank each other's breath':

> The path by which we twain did go,
> Which led by tracts that pleased us well,
> Thro' four sweet years arose and fell,
> From flower to flower, from snow to snow. (XXII. 1-4)

This stanza emphasises the circularity of the years and the seasons changing over those four years that they had together. However, the 'rise and fall' also seems to mimic the chest and lungs: the literal evidence of the fact that they were alive together. They breathed together, but at one with the wider world which sustained them.

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In Section CIII, Tennyson relates a dream of being taken by 'a little shallop' to the dead Hallam who now stands, 'thrice as large as man', on the deck of a 'great ship' (19; 42;

40). The end of the dream sees the 'wind [begin] to sweep | A music out of sheet and shroud' as together, the poet and his friend steer the ship 'toward a crimson cloud' (53-54; 55). They work together to take Hallam towards the next life, supported by the wind. The wind 'sweep[ing]' through 'sheet and shroud' drives the ship onwards towards the 'crimson cloud,' yet simultaneously creates 'a music,' as Tennyson hopes to do in the writing of *In Memoriam*. While the 'sheet and shroud' through which the wind plays to create music is primarily the sails and rigging of the ship, there also lurks the shroud in which the dead are laid out for burial: a winding-sheet.[40] This section recalls the earlier focus on the 'Fair ship' that brought Hallam's body back to England, and Tennyson's anxieties about that body being overwhelmed by the waves, never to be recovered. The dream offers a continuation of that theme, in which Hallam has become 'thrice' his original size and is about to work with Tennyson to 'steer' himself towards the next life. 'I dream'd a vision of the dead, | That left my after-morn content,' Tennyson states in the first stanza of this section (3-4); this is an instance of successful resuscitation as I have considered it in this chapter.

[40] 'shroud, n.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 9 September 2018].

CHAPTER 5

‘Empty breath | And rumours of a doubt’: the substance of speech in *Idylls of the King*

After the final battle of the Round Table in Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, Arthur tasks his last-serving knight, Bedivere, with casting Excalibur into a mysterious lake. Bedivere finally manages to do this after twice finding himself unable. One might read this inability on Bedivere’s part as greed (as Arthur himself does), and in fact the first time that he goes to throw Excalibur into the lake it is the material aspect of the sword on which he focuses. He is ‘dazzled’ by the ‘Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work | Of subtlest jewellery,’ to the point that he seems unable to think lucidly about why he cannot do the King’s bidding: ‘but at last it seemed | Better to leave Excalibur concealed’ (‘The Passing of Arthur’, 224-30).[1] It is at the second attempt, though, that he is able to put his deeper reluctance into words (or to articulate a better justification for his reluctance):

> ‘And if indeed I cast the brand away,
> Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
> Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
> Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
> What good should follow this, if this were done?
> What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,
> Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
> Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
> An act unprofitable, against himself?
> The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
> What record, or what relic of my lord
> Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
> And rumours of a doubt? But were this kept,
> Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
> Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
> Saying, “King Arthur’s sword, Excalibur,
> Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.

[1] Unless stated otherwise, I refer to *Idylls of the King* in its final, 1885 version.

Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honour and much fame were lost.' (256-77)[2]

Bedivere's concerns, voiced at the very end of the poem, echo concerns that emerge throughout *Idylls*. These concerns are about how to tell a story, whether to trust the spoken word, and uncertainty about security and proof. Bedivere is worried that 'empty breath | And rumours of a doubt' will affect how Arthur may be remembered in the future if there is nothing to show for his reign, except for spoken stories. This anxiety is particularly apposite, coming as it does near the end of a lengthy work in which speech is often shifting and untrustworthy, but at the same time has alarming consequences. Donald Hair writes that, 'from the very beginning, slander is the chief threat to Arthur's order,' and, certainly, Camelot is brought to ruin by gossip and the inevitable breakdown of trust.[3] Breath becomes a particularly dangerous and malicious weapon in Camelot: it is difficult to prove what has been said and who has said what, yet the memory of what has been said does not fade as easily as the precise details. Gossip and accusation in Camelot are fast-changing and mutable, forming and re-forming into 'many rumours' ('The Coming of Arthur', 177). Bedivere's anxiety about 'empty breath' plays on the fact that, once the spoken word has exited the body it evaporates and disappears, leaving no proof that it was ever there, except in the minds of others.[4] Running through *Idylls* is this preoccupation with proof: insubstantial breath in the form of gossip or spoken stories is continually set against the need for more concrete,

[2] Tennyson makes much more of Bedivere's reasoning for not immediately throwing away the sword than Malory does. In Malory's version, Bedivere merely thinks: 'yf I throwe this ryche swerde in the water, thereof shal neuer come good, but harme and losse' (*Caxton's Malory: A New Edition of Sir Thomas Malory's* Le Morte Darthur. *Based on the Pierpont Morgan Copy of William Caxton's Edition of 1485*, ed. by James W. Spisak, 2 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), I, 590).
[3] Donald S. Hair, *Tennyson's Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 147.
[4] This distrust of a specific sub-set of the spoken word (verbosity and empty words) has worked its way into our language with idioms such as 'full of hot air', 'windbag' and 'long winded'.

physical evidence. Tennyson explicitly turns to the breath as a way to describe rumour and gossip in *Idylls* (rather than using it simply as a metaphor for speech), and I read this decision as part of a cultural framework of thinking about insubstantiality and proof. The act of breathing maintains an invisible link between a person and their surrounding atmosphere, but, when voiced as speech, offers the possibility to communicate or distort language and history, and to create or break trust.

It was in the weeks following the news of Hallam's death in 1833 that Tennyson began the short poem about the end of King Arthur's life, entitled 'Morte d'Arthur', which would later develop into 'The Passing of Arthur'. The 'germinative lines of *Idylls of the King* were written in the same notebook alongside the first cantos of *In Memoriam*,' and some of 'The Passing of Arthur' is drawn out of the texture of *In Memoriam,* re-imagined and reworked.[5] Tennyson's main source for *Idylls* was Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*.[6] Originally published in 1485, *Le Morte D'Arthur* was initially extremely popular, and went through multiple reprints until 1634, after which it was not reprinted again until the early nineteenth century. Endorsed by Southey, the Poet Laureate, who wrote the preface to Thomas Davison's 1817 edition, *Le Morte D'Arthur* became the best-known Arthurian text of the nineteenth-century revival of interest in Arthurian legend. Tennyson continued to rework and publish additions to *Idylls* until 1885, over fifty years after beginning 'Morte d'Arthur'. Bedivere's anxiety about trusting to the insecurity of the spoken word mirrors Tennyson's insecurity about the stability of a finished work. *Idylls*, even more so than *In Memoriam*, is a poem that Tennyson would not, or could not, let go.

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[5] Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age,* p. 54.

[6] The Welsh *Mabinogion* was also a strong influence on some of the middle idylls: 'The Marriage of Geraint' and 'Geraint and Enid' are drawn particularly from the *Mabinogion*. See David Matthews, 'Scholarship and Popular Culture in the Nineteenth Century,' in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature,* ed. by Helen Fulton (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009; 2012) pp. 355-67 (p. 361).

Arthur and Camelot

Gossip and rumour define Arthur from the beginning of *Idylls*. Everyone tells different versions of Arthur's coming, and these are then repeated by others – the reader is never given a clear version of events, but is left to pick over the stories and extract some semblance of truth from them. The various doubtful voices of the public are introduced early in 'The Coming of Arthur', and question the legitimacy of Arthur's parentage:

> For while he lingered there,
> A doubt that ever smouldered in the hearts
> Of those great Lords and Barons of his realm
> Flashed forth and into war: for most of these,
> Colleaguing with a score of petty kings,
> Made head against him, crying, 'Who is he
> That he should rule us? who hath proven him
> King Uther's son? for lo! we look at him,
> And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice,
> Are like to those of Uther whom we knew.
> This is the son of Gorloïs, not the King;
> This is the son of Anton, not the King'. (62-73)

Tennyson's Arthur does not have a clear and simple background. The sources and stories of Arthur's possible heritage become more bizarre as the idyll progresses. Bedivere, the first of Arthur's knights, relates a version of normal (although premature) birth – 'all before his time | Was Arthur born' – but first qualifies it by hinting, 'there be those who deem him more than man, | And dream he dropt from heaven' (210-11; 181-82).[7] Other supernatural beginnings are suggested by Bellicent, the Queen of Orkney, who points out that Arthur is 'fair | Beyond the race of Britons and of men' (329-30). One of the stories she has heard is that of the huge wave of flame at Tintagel, from which Arthur appears: 'And down the wave and in the flame was borne | A naked babe' (382-83). Later, in 'Gareth and Lynette,' Gareth's mother alludes to the 'many who deem him not, | Or will not deem him, wholly proven King' and speaks of the

[7] Possibly an allusion to Macduff, who 'was from his mother's womb | Untimely ripp'd' (V. 8. 15-16, Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, pp. 969-95).

'cloud that settles round his birth' (119-20; 128). The 'cloud' is not only an image of confusion and obscurity, but of rumour itself (condensed 'hot air'). Both Arthur's birth and his death are linked to the airy and the insubstantial (a 'cloud', and 'empty breath').

One of the most important changes that Tennyson makes to Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* is this prolonged atmosphere of suspicion. In Malory's version, Arthur's legitimate right to the crown is publicly observed and acknowledged: in Chapter VI of *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Arthur pulls the sword out of the anvil multiple times in front of large groups of people, thus proving beyond reasonable doubt his legitimacy as King. Tennyson, by contrast, deliberately chooses to create a world and a situation in which rumour prevails above certain knowledge, and proof, although often demanded, is rarely – if ever – offered.

In 'The Coming of Arthur', Bellicent tells King Leodogran about the importance of understanding how language makes things happen at Camelot:

> 'So Merlin riddling angered me; but thou
> Fear not to give this King thine only child,
> Guinevere: so great bards of him will sing
> Hereafter; and dark sayings from of old
> Ranging and ringing through the minds of men,
> And echoed by old folk beside their fires
> For comfort after their wage-work is done,
> Speak of the King; and Merlin in our time
> Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn
> Though men may wound him that he will not die,
> But pass, again to come; and then or now
> Utterly smite the heathen underfoot,
> Till these and all men hail him for their king'. (411-23)

Bellicent links together all the ways that Arthur is spoken about in Camelot, from the song of 'great bards' to the chattering of 'old folk beside their fires', from 'dark sayings from of old' to 'Merlin in our time'. Past, present and future tale-telling is drawn together, from the highest to the lowest forms. This also charts the process by which

statements can become distorted: prophecy might become gossip, which will, in turn, have its own power of making things happen.

The atmosphere of uncertainty creates questions about Arthur's physical being. In Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* Arthur is definitely born and is even breastfed by his surrogate mother (Chapter III). By contrast, Tennyson's 'The Coming of Arthur' begins once its protagonist has grown up, meaning that the birth, or 'coming,' is never narrated first hand to the reader. All the jostling, contrasting voices together begin to create a confusing and elusive image of Arthur. This image remains vague for much of *Idylls* partly because Arthur is seemingly absent for much of the time. As King, Arthur inhabits a liminal space and has an enigmatic connection to his knights. Once he has been knighted in 'The Coming of Arthur,' the knights swear allegiance to him: 'The King will follow Christ, and we the King, | In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing' (499-500). This casts Arthur as something in between spirit and flesh. He is at least a mediator between the human and the divine, if not divine himself. This emphasises his humanity, reminiscent as it is of Genesis 2. 7 ('And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul'), but also suggests the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Christ ('And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost', John 20. 22). Neither fully one thing nor the other, Arthur, as King, stands somewhere between the everyday human and the unreachable God. Tennyson's final addition to the 'Epilogue: To the Queen' (which was also the last line to be added to *Idylls* as a whole), shortly before his death, substantiates this duality: Arthur is 'Ideal manhood closed in real man' (38).

Through his articulated breath Arthur relates to, and holds power over, his knights. Bellicent tells Leodogran what she knows of Arthur's founding of the Round Table:

> 'O King,' she cried, 'and I will tell thee: few,
> Few, but all brave, all of one mind with him;
> For I was near him when the savage yells
> Of Uther's peerage died, and Arthur sat
> Crowned on the daïs, and his warriors cried,
> "Be thou the king, and we will work thy will
> Who love thee." Then the King in low deep tones,
> And simple words of great authority,
> Bound them by so strait vows to his own self,
> That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some
> Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,
> Some flushed, and others dazed, as one who wakes
> Half-blinded at the coming of a light.
>
> But when he spake and cheered his Table Round
> With large, divine, and comfortable words,
> Beyond my tongue to tell thee – I beheld
> From eye to eye through all their Order flash
> A momentary likeness of the King:
> And ere it left their faces, through the cross
> And those around it and the Crucified,
> Down from the casement over Arthur, smote
> Flame-colour, vert and azure, in three rays'. (253-74)

This is a vivid image of the effect that sopeech can have. Simply by listening to him talk, the knights are momentarily imbued with the 'likeness' of Arthur. The Christ-like 'large, divine, and comfortable' words are what constitute Arthur's power, enabling him to transport and transform his men.[8] The unusual power of his speech is illuminated in this episode by the inexpressibility topos. Bellicent cannot find the words to describe the specific terms of Arthur's speech; she can only describe their effect on

[8] Tennyson was not a regular churchgoer but he would have been conversant with the Anglican Holy Communion, in some versions of which the scriptural passages may be prefaced by the phrase: 'Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all who truly turn to him' (see: *The Book of Common Prayer. The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. by Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 134); 'comfortable' means not just 'comforting', as in the modern sense, but also 'strengthening or supporting (morally or spiritually)': 'comfortable, adj.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 18 September 2018]; the phrase, 'comfortable words', also appears in II. 2. 78 of Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second* (pp. 339-67) – Tennyson's use of it is therefore, in part, a warning.

the knights. Arthur's words are more than human when he addresses his knights in his role as King. As King, his most important relationship is the one with his knights, and his most important characteristic is his ability to rule well or ill. He cannot be an individual, but is rather a role model and leader of a group. Taking this to its furthest limit, Arthur is inextricably linked to the life and health of his kingdom.

Much has been written about the influence of Hallam on the figure of Arthur, and this description of Arthur's captivating talk is a particularly strong example.[9] It is both reminiscent of Hallam's own words when describing Coleridge, and of the way that he himself was remembered to have been able to talk. The Coleridge of Hallam's *Timbuctoo* (as discussed at the end of Chapter 3), is the 'good, old man, | Most eloquent, who spake of things divine', surrounded by 'youths' who 'scan | His countenance' and are revitalised by his words.[10] Similarly, the Hallam of *In Memoriam* electrifies his audience with his 'rapt oration' and his 'face' appears to be alight with the 'God within him' (LXXXVII. 32; 36). These traces of Coleridge and Hallam emphasise both the importance of well-chosen spoken words and of fellowship created through talk. Spoken words are used to hold a group together – symbolised by the fleetingly similar faces of Arthur and his knights – and, for a moment, the speaker appears divine. Tennyson's Arthur is also able to speak directly and plainly, in 'simple words of great authority.' In this moment Arthur is a convincing leader.

This moment of vow-taking in *Idylls* is notable as it is not only the founding of the Round Table, but is also an unusual instance in which the spoken word in *Idylls* is fixed, rather than shifting. By binding the knights 'by so strait vows to his own self,'

[9] See John D. Rosenberg, 'Tennyson and the Passing of Arthur', in *The Passing of Arthur: New Essays in Arthurian Tradition,* ed. by Christopher Baswell and William Sharpe (New York: Grand Publishing, 1988) pp. 221-43, and Cammy Thomas, 'The Two Arthurs', *Tennyson Research Bulletin*, 6 (1993), 99-111.
[10] Hallam, p. 29.

Arthur is attempting to maintain control of Camelot by the power of the spoken word. This is an optimistic intention. As Elaine Scarry states:

> the announcement that something is 'an oath' and the announcement that something is 'gossip' assert two very different quantities of material content. It would not be difficult to arrange the many verbal forms along a spectrum at one end of which language is loaded with referential obligations and at the other end of which it is nearly empty.[11]

Camelot may be founded on oaths loaded with referential obligations, but gossip already exists and continues to exist in the kingdom, and is pivotal in the later dissolution of it. The knights, in swearing their allegiance to Arthur, focus on a suggestion of the divine right of kings, that 'God hath breathed a secret thing' into him. This divine right to rule, imagined through the breath, sets Arthur up as something other, or greater, than his subjects, but also carries in it a hint of warning: the divine right of kings does not automatically make kings right, and nor does it make them safe. In Shakespeare's *Richard II*, for instance, we see Richard state:

> Not all the water in the rough rude sea
> Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;
> The breath of worldly men cannot depose
> The deputy elected by the Lord. (III. 2. 54-57)

Richard is wrong in this supposition, of course, and the audience is able to see Bolingbroke defeat him. In his own way, Tennyson explores the problems with this expectation too. As I will go on to show, in *Idylls*, 'the breath of worldly men' can in fact 'depose | The deputy elected by the Lord,' despite the vows that have been sworn by the knights, who, at the time of swearing, believe that 'high God hath breathed a secret thing' into their King.

In the early days of Camelot, though, the memory of Arthur's use of speech continues as the foremost type, over and above gossip and rumour. In 'Gareth and

[11] Elaine Scarry, 'Introduction', in *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, ed. by Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. vii-xxvii (p. vii).

Lynette', Gareth's mother tells Gareth that she 'knew [Arthur] King' because she had 'heard him Kingly speak,' leading her to feel 'him mine, | Of closest kin to me' (121; 123; 124-25). For her, the way he speaks shows him for what he is (the King), and, furthermore, this leads to a sense of fellowship and closeness with him. However, there is criticism of the way that Arthur attempts to control the kingdom and the people in it through language. The old Seer warns Gareth not to 'pass | Beneath this archway' (263-64) into the city unless he wants to become,

> A thrall to his enchantments, for the King
> Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame
> A man should not be bound by, yet the which
> No man can keep. (265-68)

Already Arthur's 'large, divine, and comfortable words' have become 'enchantments,' and the idea that people might be 'bound' by vows is both problematic and unrealistic. 'Gareth and Lynette' is only the second idyll, but the possibility of creating a kingdom from spoken words is already being questioned.

An atmosphere of rumour

Tennyson narrates *Idylls* so that the reader experiences the story in a similar way to the characters within it: through rumour and hearsay. At the end of 'Gareth and Lynette,' for example, the reader is not given a satisfactory, factual conclusion to the tale, but is left with the varying stories that people tell:

> And he that told the tale in older times
> Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
> But he, that told it later, says Lynette. (1392-94)

Tennyon both makes himself a part of the development of Arthurian legend and ensures that the reader experiences the same uncertainties as the community at Camelot

regarding what can and cannot be trusted. Take, for example, the first suggestion of rumour about Lancelot and Guinevere in 'The Marriage of Geraint':

> But when a rumour rose about the Queen,
> Touching her guilty love for Lancelot,
> Though yet there lived no proof, nor yet was heard
> The world's loud whisper breaking into storm,
> Not less Geraint believed it; and there fell
> A horror on him, lest his gentle wife,
> Through that great tenderness for Guinevere,
> Had suffered, or should suffer any taint
> In nature. (24-31)

This is the first the reader hears of any possible liaison between Guinevere and Lancelot and 'though yet there lived no proof,' it is already presented as a 'guilty love.' The reader is not told the whole story of their affair, but hears it in snippets and whisperings. It is drip fed, so that by the time it is important, we are used to it, and we also know why it will be important, as so many people have been affected by it. This first suggestion is simply about the initial stirrings of something that is to develop. The reader knows there is more to come as, 'nor yet was heard | The world's loud whisper breaking into storm.' The storytelling voice invites us to trust in its own futurity.

However, although when this first 'rumour rose about the Queen, | Touching her guilty love for Lancelot' the 'storm' has not yet broken, this does not mean that it does not have far-reaching effects on other characters at the time. Although 'yet there lived no proof [….] | Not less Geraint believed it.' Geraint's concern is that association with Guinevere may 'taint' Enid, which is, as James Eli Adams points out, a 'rationale that Tennyson added to his sources'.[12] Geraint believes implicitly in the gossip, despite the lack of 'proof.' He therefore takes Enid away from court and, through a series of misunderstandings, spurns her, tests her, and finally trusts her again. What is curious, though, is that through the way he acts based on his concerns, he himself becomes a

[12] James Eli Adams, 'Harlots and Base Interpreters: Scandal and Slander in "Idylls of the King"', *Victorian Poetry,* 30 (1992), 421-439 (p. 427).

source of rumour and gossip. Ironically, it is he who suffers the 'taint' – something catching – rather than Enid, through his own dubious actions stemming from his suspicions. The people that they meet begin 'to scoff and jeer and babble of him' (58). This then itself precipitates more problems, as Enid is 'saddened' by his becoming a source of gossip, 'While he that watched her sadden, was the more | Suspicious that her nature had a taint' (64; 67-68). The cycle continues: when she speaks to herself of her worries under her breath, thinking him asleep, 'by great mischance | He heard but fragments of her later words' (112-13). This incomplete communication is typical of how gossip and rumour work: people usually only hear 'fragments,' which is how false knowledge can come about.

Despite learning to trust Enid again, Geraint's opinion of Guinevere is changed for ever by what he has heard spoken about her. Even when he and Enid do move back to Camelot, in 'Geraint and Enid,' he can never quite forget what he once heard:

> Geraint could never take again
> That comfort from their converse which he took
> Before the Queen's fair name was breathed upon. (948-50)

Rumour and gossip have 'tainted' Guinevere's 'fair name' for Geraint, and he cannot un-hear what he has heard said of her. Furthermore, the image of her name having been 'breathed upon' suggests that the breath of (the inhabitants of) Camelot itself, which articulated the rumours, is dirty or contaminating. The rumour and gossip that have been breathed out and articulated about Guinevere have created an atmosphere around her (sullying her 'fair name'), which Geraint has then breathed in, affecting 'for ever' the way that he thinks of her. I have examined (in Chapters 1 and 2) the way that the atmosphere, or specific 'airs', could affect thought and experience, and I traced this cultural movement from the scientific laboratory, to the asylum and to prison

environments, and to the poetic imagination. In *Idylls*, rumour becomes a verbal version of the same phenomenon.

It is worth noting that even before Enid met Geraint or went to the court, she was a victim of slander when the 'sparrow-hawk,' her cousin, 'sowed a slander in the common ear' to turn the locals against her whole family ('The Marriage of Geraint', 446; 450). Slander – a lie that is verbally spread to sully the reputation of others – differs from gossip and rumour in that it is deliberate. The cousin who 'sowed a slander in the common ear' was the originator of that slander, purposely planting it to watch it grow. The pun on 'ear' as both the listening ears of the people and the community as a crop of grain, ripe for infection, allows the reader to make their own connections with the seed of doubt that arises from hearing slander.

With the appearance of Vivian, in 'Balin and Balan', Tennyson brings slander into the spotlight. Vivien is able to lie 'with ease,' but what makes her so dangerous – particularly to the impressionable Balin – is that she deliberately mingles truth and lies in her tale telling, so that it is difficult to distinguish between what, and what not, to believe (517). Her graphic account of an intimate liaison between Lancelot and Guinevere, in which the latter's 'white hand' had 'wandered from her own King's golden head, | And lost itself in darkness,' is not impossible, considering the rumours that have already been flying around about the couple (504-6). The reader, too, is partly aware of the story, but may also be surprised by the specific details to which Vivien appears to have access. Taken in, Balin 'Breathed in a dismal whisper "It is truth"' (519). Vivien is fully aware of how gossip spreads, as she tells Balin: 'Woods have tongues, | As walls have ears' (522-23). What she does not say is that she is using this knowledge to her advantage to ensure that her slander becomes gossip in Camelot. Balin and Balan discover too late that Vivien 'lied,' coming to the conclusion that

Guinevere is 'pure as our own true Mother' (517; 606). However, although there were (probably) embellishments and untruths in what Vivien said, this does not mean that she spoke only lies to Balin. His limited conclusions are a reminder to the reader of the importance of nuance and detail – Guinevere is probably not 'pure' at this point, but nor is she the villain that Vivien describes to Balin.

Vivien's return, in 'Merlin and Vivien', ensures that this is an idyll in which seeds of slander are sown and watered, as 'the slanderer herself becomes the central figure'.[13] With access to the heart of Camelot, Vivien deliberately spreads stories, and guarantees that they will grow by her own doing:

> But Vivien half-forgotten of the Queen
> Among her damsels broidering sat, heard, watched
> And whispered: through the peaceful court she crept
> And whispered: then as Arthur in the highest
> Leavened the world, so Vivien in the lowest,
> Arriving at a time of golden rest,
> And sowing one ill hint from ear to ear,
> While all the heathen lay at Arthur's feet,
> And no quest came, but all was joust and play,
> Leavened his hall. They heard and let her be. (135-44)

The repetition of 'And whispered' emphasises the repetitive nature of the storytelling, visually underlined by the fact that Tennyson has placed the words at the beginning of successive lines. Furthermore, the connection to the breath is explicit. As well as being onomatopoetically suggestive of hushed, breathy communication, to whisper means, according to the OED, 'To speak softly "under one's breath" […] esp. in the ear of another, for the sake of secrecy.'[14] The circulating rumour, gossip and slander in *Idylls* is passed on under the breath, until it has developed its own power. As well as 'And whispered,' the word 'leavened' also falls twice at the beginning of lines in the above passage, highlighting its significance. Vivien's unwholesome leavening of Arthur's

[13] Hair, p. 148.
[14] 'whisper, v.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 12 September 2018].

'hall' is set against his own leavening of 'the world.' As she displaces him, she is controlling and interfering with a process that would usually be natural (as yeast leavening bread), and which she manages to make appear natural by the way that she mingles her lies with truth, or at least with established rumour. Her leavening recalls the slander that was 'sowed […] in the common ear' by Enid's cousin in 'The Marriage of Geraint': by this point in *Idylls* the seed of doubt has been sowed and, strengthened by whispering, needs only leavening to bring it to a culmination. According to Galatians 5. 9, 'A little leaven leavens the whole lump', and Vivien, working from the inside, does not need to do much to spread and multiply her poisonous 'bread'.

Although Tennyson's Camelot has always been rife with rumour and gossip, as we saw in relation to the tales of Arthur's 'coming', the community is more vulnerable to Vivien because this is a world that is founded on inflexible, 'strait vows' ('The Coming of Arthur', 261). Arthur set up a kingdom, held together by binding verbal agreements, to live by the words of those agreements, but he cannot control trust, and – as the *Idylls* progress – he cannot control what is thought and said, nor what is done. Later in 'Merlin and Vivien,' when Vivien comes across 'Arthur walking all alone', 'Vext at a rumour issued from herself | Of some corruption crept among his knights', it is clear that her leavening and whispering has worked, and is already creating problems (150-52). He is being supplanted by Vivien's slanderous version of him.

As Catherine R. Harland indicates, 'while Vivien lies […] her most insidious characteristic – and the one hardest to combat – is the potent fusion of truth and lies [….] This confusion of true and false becomes more pronounced as the kingdom disintegrates'. Harland links this quality to Virgil's Fama ('Fame,' or 'Rumour') in the *Aeneid* (IV. 190), who mingles 'facta atque infecta,' and who, Harland argues, is a 'classical antecedent' to Vivien. The exchange between Merlin and Vivien about

rumours in Camelot consists of Vivien offering a rumour about someone in Camelot (her attacks on people's characters proceed from the knights, to Lancelot and Guinevere, and finally to Arthur himself), and Merlin attempting to counter it. In the earlier attacks, on Sir Valence or Sir Sagramore, Merlin is able to offer the apparently truthful version of 'the tale' that Vivien refers to, emphasising this with his statement: 'take the truth' (711; 717). However, this becomes increasingly difficult for him, as he lacks the proof to be able to refute her stories. As Harland points out, by the attack on Sir Percivale, 'Merlin is unable to adduce fact but must appeal to his faith in Percivale's whole character: "that he sinned is not believable, | For, look upon his face!" (758-59).'[15] Despite the fact that he cannot prove much himself, Merlin nevertheless denounces Vivien's accusations based on her lack of proof: 'You breathe but accusation vast and vague, | Spleen-born, I think, and proofless' (699-700). Like Bedivere's concern about 'empty breath' being unable to offer proof of Camelot's existence, Vivien's 'breathing' here is only accusation, and is 'proofless.' Furthermore, according to Merlin, it is sullying, just as the gossip was in 'The Marriage of Geraint' and 'Geraint and Enid'. 'Though yet there lived no proof,' Geraint had still been concerned that the 'taint' of the gossip may infect Enid, based on her associations with someone whose name had been so negatively 'breathed upon.' The need for proof becomes ever more important in *Idylls* in this shifting atmosphere of doubt.

This need to offer proof, particularly in a poisonous atmosphere created by slander, and in which truth and lies are difficult to separate, may have roots in the context of the composition of *Idylls*. Adams offers a reading of *Idylls* within a framework of Victorian divorce cases and invasions of privacy, writing that,

[15] Catherine R. Harland, 'Interpretation and Rumor in Tennyson's "Merlin and Vivien"', *Victorian Poetry*, 35 (1997), 57-68 (pp. 61; 60; 62).

> Tennyson's longing for privacy and his acute sensitivity to hostile criticism are central facts of his career, but his preoccupation with publicity seems to have been especially acute in the 1850s, during the composition of *Maud* and the early books of the *Idylls*. In both of these works, sexual betrayal is pointedly bound up with exposure to invasive publicity. In this regard, Tennyson's personal concerns articulated a contemporary preoccupation of the Victorian reading public, for the 1850s were marked by sustained national discussion of the legal forms of divorce and marriage, which culminated in the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 [….] the most sordid private facts of respectable English domesticity were laid bare, not only though tales of brutality, betrayal, and sexual deviance, but in mutual allegations of fabriction, slander, and suborned testimony. As one member of the House of Lords put it during debates in 1856, 'Their lordships were aware that nothing was so difficult as to get at the facts in applications for divorce [….] The parties told what they liked, and proved what they pleased.' And, of course, *Idylls of the King* is from the very outset structured not simply by contrasting models of female sexuality, but by networks of rumor, gossip, scandal, and slander, networks in which characters are constantly demanding 'proof' not only of individual fidelity but of the stories that characters tell about one another.

Adams further points out that Tennyson 'departs from his sources [for 'Merlin and Vivien'] by setting Vivien's designs in a world of slander and scandal'.[16] Gossip and slander cannot be proven without creating substantiality, and, without proof either way (to either prove or disprove beyond any doubt), the possibility of the story remains.

Disintegration of Camelot

As a destructive force, the spoken word is extremely powerful at Camelot, and, misspent, is effective in bringing the kingdom to its knees. It is ubiquitous and influential, bringing about subtle changes that affect trust bit by bit. Breath that is given voice as words can be sharp and damaging; when Vivien finally gives in to her anger in 'Merlin and Vivien' she loses control of it:

> But Vivien, deeming Merlin overborne
> By instance, recommenced, and let her tongue
> Rage like a fire among the noblest names,
> Polluting, and imputing her whole self,

[16] Adams, pp. 422-23.

> Defaming and defacing, till she left
> Not even Lancelot brave, nor Galahad clean. (798-803)

Vivien's angry talk is self-destructive and somewhat inhuman. 'Like a fire' it is harmful, and this suggestion that words can destroy and corrupt returns again and again in *Idylls*. In 'Lancelot and Elaine', gossip 'ran the tale like fire about the court' (729), while in 'Pelleas and Ettare', Pelleas himself is driven to become a mouthpiece for evil speech due to the rumours that he hears about Lancelot and Guinevere:

> 'I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame,
> And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast
> And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen'. (556-58)

The image of passing 'like a poisonous wind' suggests something unregulated, involuntary and difficult to control as a miasma, or a 'blaze' of fire. Yet, this 'poisonous wind' that is there to 'blaze the crime,' can also be something far more considered. To 'blaze' something is also to cut it, and therefore mark it by leaving a wound. A blaze draws attention to a thing or a place, in this case creating a trail so that others are led directly to Lancelot and Guinevere's relationship and made aware of it. This imagery is reinforced seven lines later by Lancelot's challenge that while Pelleas may not have a physical sword, he has one 'between [his] lips – and sharp' (565). Pelleas's weapon is not a physical object, but spoken word and voiced accusation. In Camelot, words can be more powerful than swords when it comes to wreaking distruction, and both Pelleas and Lancelot are well aware of this.

However, while spoken words can be more destructive than weapons if consciously put to such use, it is also unreliable and untrustworthy. One of the main reasons for the disintegration of Arthur's kingdom is his inability to control the gossip surrounding Lancelot and Guinevere. There is a question about whether it is less what they do, then the fact that it is finally talked about that breaks up the Round Table. A. Dwight Culler argues that, 'there is a real ambiguity in the poem as to whether the

rumours about Guinevere and Lancelot do not in some sense create their infidelity', and Hair develops this argument:

> If the reader focuses simply on the story of the *Idylls* as Tennyson shapes it, and attempts to explain why Arthur's order fails, the explanation that the poem itself most obviously suggests is slander or gossip. Tennyson deliberately leaves vague the point at which Guinevere and Lancelot actually commit adultery, and although that act may be the 'one sin' that Tennyson himself said ruined 'the dream of man coming into practical life,' the poem itself raises the question as to whether the act gives rise to the gossip, or the gossip gives rise to the act. The weight of suggestion in the *Idylls* is on the latter. For if words have the power to create, as Arthur's vows create a kingdom, words also have the power to destroy, and the explicit theme of many of the *Idylls* is the destructive nature of slander.[17]

Tennyson chooses to construct *Idylls* in such a way that it is unclear when exactly the act that is gossiped about first happens. What is conveyed to the reader, therefore, is a sense that rumour and gossip have created something in the world, which then itself offers proof of its own happening. At the end of 'Pelleas and Ettare', Lancelot and Guinevere look at each other,

> And each foresaw the dolorous day to be:
> And all talk died, as in a grove all song
> Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey;
> Then a long silence came upon the hall,
> And Modred thought, 'The time is hard at hand.' (593-97)

Lancelot and Guinevere's worry here is that when gossip stops it is because there is no longer any question or intrigue to gossip over. Therefore that moment in which it stops is the most dangerous, as it is when things might be about to happen.

In fact, Tennyson presents the breathed rumour and accusation that precipitate this downfall as having their own agency. In 'The Coming of Arthur' we were told that Bedivere would frequently speak up for Arthur 'Whenever slander breathed against the King', a phrase that implies that the slander is self-perpetuating – it is slander itself that breathes 'against the King' (176). The insidious breath of gossip increases in the course

[17] A. Dwight Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 239; Hair, p. 147.

of *Idylls*, to the point where Camelot will fragment entirely. Following directly from the poisonous slander and bitter counter-accusations regarding proof in 'Merlin and Vivien', Tennyson draws the focus of 'Lancelot and Elaine' out again to show how well Vivien's planted whisperings have grown and 'leavened', also reminding us of how ingrained rumour and gossip have become in Camelot. After Lancelot is wounded he attempts to remove himself from the world while he heals:

> Hid from the wide world's rumour by the grove
> Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,
> And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay. (520-22)

Although Lancelot attempts to protect himself from the whisperings at Camelot, the trees themselves seem to have taken up the whispering sounds instead. Aspens have in fact long been associated with (gendered) gossip and scandal. Colloquial names for aspen include 'Women's Tongues' or 'Old Wives Tongues,' and aspen leaves have been used as a metaphor for women's gossiping tongues.[18] We might recall Vivien telling Balin that 'Woods have tongues, | As walls have ears' ('Balin and Balan', 522-23), and later, in 'Lancelot and Elaine', Lancelot states that Elaine may not 'follow [him] through the world' for the same reason (934):

> 'Nay, the world, the world,
> All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart
> To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue
> To blare its own interpretation'. (935-38)

Rumour and gossip are part of the world of Camelot itself. Lancelot attempts to go into hiding from the world of gossip, but his hiding place is full of such sounds and images, an experience that is mirrored in 'Guinevere'.

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[18] See: 'aspen, adj. and n.', '3) *esp*. in reference to a woman's tongue', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 10 September 2018], and Donald Watts, *Dictionary of Plant Lore* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2007) p. 18; 'The cultural myth of women's verbosity' has a long history, as Jennifer Coates observes, and, I suggest, can be seen played out in *Idylls* particularly in the chatter of the little novice in 'Guinevere' (Jennifer Coates, *Women, Men and Language: A Sociolinguistic Account of Gender Differences in Language* (London: Longman, 1993), p. 33).

Guinevere is increasingly aware of what is said of her, and this is highlighted when Tennyson turns his attention to her specifically in 'Guinevere.' Even once she has left the court, Guinevere is unable to hide from what people are saying about her. Away from Camelot and concealed within the walls of the nunnery, she is immediately reminded of the gossip that follows her by the 'prattling' novice, who does not realise to whom she is speaking ('prattling' is repeated: 181; 314). There is a recurrent focus on the novice's talkativeness. She is a 'babbler' (352) with a 'gadding tongue' (311) who repeatedly speaks 'garrulously' ('garrulously' is used three times: 229; 274; 310). She even comments on 'her own garrulity garrulously' (310). The novice is essentially a personification of gossip. Unlike Vivien, however, she does not tell these stories with any poisonous intention, but rather without thought at all. The novice had originally 'pleased [Guinevere] with a babbling heedlessness | Which often lured her from herself', but Guinevere's ease in listening to her changes once her babble turns to the latest 'rumour wildly blown about', and the novice unwittingly starts to talk about Guinevere herself (149-50; 151).

Babble has in fact already appeared a number of times in *Idylls* before 'Guinevere': in 'Geraint and Enid', where Limours 'babbled to his men, | How Enid never loved a man but him' (362-3); in 'Lancelot and Elaine', when the courtiers 'babbled of the King' when they saw the dead Elaine (1252); and in 'The Last Tournament' Dragonet accuses the knights that they 'babble about' Arthur (340). Hair points out that 'the same verb turns up in Hallam Tennyson's *Memoir*, for instance, when Tennyson complains of the curiosity of the public about a poet's private life ("It is all for the sake of babble")'. Hair posits that:

> His use of 'babble' may owe something to Carlyle, who, in an 1842 letter to Tennyson, defends his criticism of Tennyson's poems by saying, 'This is not babble; it is speech.' The context of Carlyle's nouns suggets the nature of the distinction between them: speech is based upon judgment, and on the effort to

> judge correctly; babble indicates not so much a failure in judgment as it does a slight or inadequate effort to judge at all.[19]

This distinction between 'speech' and 'babble' is evident in 'Guinevere', and reminds the reader of the spoken words and vows that have bound Camelot together, as well as those that have torn it apart. The novice brings up the 'rumour wildly blown about' partly as it is to do with public image, just as the Victorian reading public was particularly fascinated by all the gory details of divorce cases played out on the public stage. Talking about how much harder it must be for the 'great ones' when they are unhappy, she says that this is because 'howsoever much they may desire | Silence, they cannot weep behind a cloud' (202; 204-5). The more the novice speaks, the more difficult Guinevere finds it to listen to her – in her inner thoughts the novice's chatter turns from 'innocent talk' to 'foolish prate' in just eleven lines (212; 223). Having chosen to go into the nunnery, Guinevere had hoped to be hidden 'from the voices crying "shame"', but inevitably the novice disrupts this opportunity for experiencing peace (666).

Guinevere's understanding of herself is largely shaped through what other people say about her. In 'Lancelot and Elaine', Lancelot muses on Guinevere's 'crescent fear for name and fame' (1389). Crescent, from the Latin 'crescere' (to grow), in 'Lancelot and Elaine' only serves as a momentary warning to the reader that this fear of Guinevere's might become important.[20] As *Idylls* moves towards the denouement of Lancelot and Guinevere's story in 'Guinevere', however, fear is fed on the breath of gossip, and grows. It is in 'Guinevere' that the reader witnesses Guinevere's own anxiety first hand about how she will be seen in the future:

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[19] Hair, p. 149; Hair goes on the suggest that 'the words that destroy Camelot are of two kinds: there is the slander of Vivien, who is actively evil, and there is the babble of Gawain, who is "light" in all his thinking and, as Arthur says of him in "The Holy Grail," "too blind to have desire to see" (868). Of the two kinds, Gawain's in the most destructive' (p. 149).

[20] 'crescent, adj.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 31 March 2016].

> The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months,
> The months will add themselves and make the years,
> The years will roll into the centuries,
> And mine will ever be a name of scorn. (619-22)[21]

This self-referential concern highlights her place within a longstanding tradition of unfaithful women such as Dante's Francesca and Chaucer's Criseyde. In Dante's *Inferno*, when explaining the reason that she is in hell, Francesca explicitly relates her own story with Paolo to that of Lancelot and Guinevere – in V. 123-35 she explains how through reading about Lancelot and Guinevere together when they were alone, Paolo came to kiss her: 'la bocca mi basciò tutto tremante' [he kissed my mouth all trembling].[22] Guinevere becomes a catalyst for further adultery, and is remembered in other literature in this role. Furthermore, Tennyson's Guinevere worries explicitly about her 'future' literary representation in a similar way to Chaucer's Criseyde. Guinevere's lexis is hauntingly like Criseyde's, at the moment that Criseyde realises the implications of her betrayal of Troilus with Diomede:

> Allas, of me vnto the worldes ende
> Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
> No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
> O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge;
> Thorugh-out the world my belle shal be ronge! (V. 1058-62)[23]

Although the 'roll' has transformed from the rolling of the name on a tongue to the rolling of the years and centuries it seems likely that Criseyde was on Tennyson's mind when he wrote Guinevere's lines.[24] It is only through death, at the end of 'Guinevere,' that the Queen can finally pass 'to where beyond these voices there is peace' (692). By

[21] Although Tennyson's Guinevere is referring to a reputation mainly comprised of written literature, 'scorn' suggests a spoken tone as well as particular words. In her earliest incarnations, Guinevere was shaped through an oral tradition, and, in Tennyson, it is through whispers and rumour that her secret love for Lancelot has been exposed.
[22] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno*, trans. by Charles S. Singleton, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), I, 54.
[23] *Troilus & Criseyde*, ed. by B. A. Windeatt (London: Longman, 1984), p. 504.
[24] Valerie Purton and Norman Page confirm that Tennyson was influenced by Chaucer's work, and that he was familiar with *Troilus and Criseyde* (Valerie Purton and Norman Page, *The Palgrave Literary Dictionary of Tennyson* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 14 and 42).

the use of the word 'these' rather than 'those,' Tennyson implicitly suggests that his own is also one of these voices. Through retelling and emphasising Guinevere's story, and the gossip that surrounds it, Tennyson is adding yet another representation of her that will linger.

Set against the 'prattling' novice in 'Guinevere' is Arthur's long speech of censure and absolution. Although, as Ryals writes, 'critics have objected that Arthur here speaks like a prig, and so indeed he does,' his speech does remind us that Camelot was founded on a positive ideal of breath used well.[25] As he tells Guinevere, the knighthood of the Round Table was supposed to 'teach high thought, and amiable words,' and he reminds her of the 'high talk of noble deeds' in Camelot, which flourished in the 'golden days before thy sin' (479; 496; 497). It is notable, however, that Arthur only refers to the 'talk' of the early days of Camelot; 'high talk of noble deeds' is not the same as carrying out noble deeds, and this draws attention to the fact that he seems to be doing his own myth-creating at this point. Having breathed Camelot into life through divine words and fixed vows, Arthur has been absent for much of *Idylls*. He appears every now and then – walking alone through Camelot in the dark, distressed at Vivien's whispering in 'Merlin and Vivien', or discussing with Lancelot and Guinevere Lancelot's decision to joust in 'Lancelot and Elaine' – but rarely, if ever, is he seen actually doing anything. At the beginning of *Idylls* Arthur was an example of positive talk ('simple words of great authority'), but his speech here, in 'Guinevere,' seems as unfair and inaccurate as the gossip itself. The reader has witnessed how doubtful and complicated culpability is throughout *Idylls*, when set against rumour and gossip, and Arthur's strangely disconnected censure is therefore difficult to rationalise. Furthermore, the 'high thought' and 'high talk' that Arthur

[25] Clyde de L. Ryals, *From the Great Deep: Essays on* Idylls of the King (New York: Ohio University Press, 1967), p. 87.

points to as evidence of a 'golden' time aligns uncomfortably with Guinevere's own memories of feeling suffocated during her time in Arthur's company. In 'Guinevere,' she remembers how she had thought Arthur 'cold, | High, self-contained, and passionless,' and that she 'thought [she] could not breathe in that fine air | That pure severity of perfect light' (412-13; 640-1). Lacking the reality, passion and the 'touch of earth' ('Lancelot and Elaine,' 133), that Lancelot has been able to offer her, Arthur's 'high talk' seems empty of humanity, meaning, and even of air – or breath – itself. It is a poignant example of the 'empty breath' about which Bedivere is so concerned in 'The Passing of Arthur.'

Arthur's breath and the atmosphere of Camelot

Despite the potential emptiness of his 'high talk,' Arthur's breath is increasingly foregrounded in the final two idylls. Arthur's breath weaves in and out of his body, at one point very physical, at another seemingly absent. Throughout *Idylls*, Tennyson brings Arthur's breath to the attention of the reader at key moments of transition or to illustrate the importance of his relationships (to his knights, to Camelot, to Excalibur, and to Guinevere). Rosenberg states that, until 'Guinevere,' Arthur has

> been largely recessed from our sight, acting less as a character within the poem than as a semidivine presence hovering over it, shaping it, the point of ideal reference by which we measure the men and women in it. But in 'Guinevere' the 'great Sun of Glory' (GL, 22) is compelled to play the role of injured husband.[26]

Arthur's language in 'Guinevere' is at times aloof and at others almost tender, but his *un*articulated breath reveals more about the tension between these two modes than the words that he speaks. At the end of his long speech of condemnation and forgiveness, to which Guinevere has been listening, she becomes aware of his unspoken breath:

[26] John D. Rosenberg, *The Fall of Camelot: A Study of Tennyson's* Idylls of the King (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 127.

> And while she grovelled at his feet,
> She felt the King's breath wander o'er her neck,
> And in the darkness o'er her fallen head,
> Perceived the waving of his hands that blest. (577-80)

This is an intimate moment, but it is also jarringly impersonal and distant. The sense of the breath wandering 'o'er her neck' is both erotic and human, yet the breather remains resolutely 'the King,' rather than 'her husband' or 'Arthur.' At this most sensitive and erotically charged moment, Arthur's distance as King and ruler is lexically maintained. However, the breath itself tells a different story: Arthur attempts to maintain his dignified reserve, but his breath, emerging warm from his body, betrays him. Invisible in the darkness of her hair, the breath's presence becomes more tangible as the other senses are heightened. Arthur's wandering breath is both a physical reminder of the actual person, and serves to distance him further from Guinevere by the fact of its having taken on separate agency. Furthermore, it is unclear where, physically, he is at this moment. He seems to be standing above her (she is 'at his feet'), but the fact that his breath feels, to Guinevere, like it is wandering 'o'er her neck' suggests that his mouth should be closer to her head. Tennyson chooses to create these dissonant possibilities: this moment gives the impression of an Arthur who is beginning to disintegrate, an impression only accentuated by 'the waving of his hands that blest,' as though he is wafting his breath ineffectually around her. The wandering of his breath 'o'er her neck,' which is both a touch and a lack of touch, is, finally, a lingering reminder that he will not be touching her so intimately hereafter.

This perception of the body betraying its owner has a proleptic parallel in 'Balin and Balan', a parallel that emphasises the tension in 'Guinevere.' In 'Balin and Balan', Vivien vividly describes Lancelot kneeling 'in amorous homage' before Guinevere, who strokes his head with her 'white hand whose ringed caress | Had wandered from her own King's golden head' (502; 504-5). In both episodes the things

doing the wandering have become separated from the person to whom they ought to be connected: it is Guinevere's hand that wanders, and it is Arthur's breath. The echoes of 'wander', 'King', 'head', and 'darkness' verbally, as well as visually, link the episode in 'Balin and Balan' with that in 'Guinevere', reminding the reader that the action of one event has precipitated the other. Within three lines of her 'white hand' having 'wandered from her own King's golden head', Vivien's Guinevere has confirmed the fact that her heart has followed her hands, when she says to Lancelot: '"Rise, my sweet King, and kiss me on the lips, | Thou art my King"' (508-9). This explicit shifting of her loyalty in 'Balin and Balan' – whether or not the actual event has any grain of truth, or is simply another of Vivian's slanders – accentuates the change in the relationship of husband and wife that has come about by the time of 'Guinevere', when she grovels at 'the King's' feet. However sensitive and erotic Arthur's wandering breath, it must now always remain the 'King's' breath to her.

Arthur's breath had already made an appearance earlier in the idyll in Guinevere's memories of their former life together and how, 'In the dead night,' she had lain 'Many a time for hours, | Beside the placid breathings of the King' ('Guinevere', 69; 67-68). The physical presence of Arthur's breath overwhelms him as he lies in bed, emphasising both his corporeality and his absence. The 'placid breathings' of a sleeping person seem comfortingly substantial, yet the person doing the breathing in this case is almost non-existent: only the memory of the breaths remain. Furthermore, this memory emphasises Arthur's absence as a husband and as a lover. Guinevere's memory of their nights spent together is of loneliness: not only is there a lack of intimacy, but there is even the suggestion of a lack of a body at all. 'Who loves me must have a touch of earth,' she tells Lancelot in 'Lancelot and Elaine', as she verbalises her differing feelings for the two men (133). As I have said, her first memory

of Arthur is that she 'thought him cold, | High, self-contained, and passionless,' and in her eyes he compares unfavourably: 'Not like my Lancelot' ('Guinevere', 412-13; 414). As we see in her memory of their nights spent together, Arthur seems absent as a physical lover, lacking as he does the 'warmth and colour' of Lancelot (642).

Arthur has been absent and somewhat insubstantial for much of the time in *Idylls*, yet in 'Guinevere' he not only shrinks to a censorious voice and a wandering breath, but he becomes even less substantial than the surrounding atmosphere. The scene is set at the beginning of 'Guinevere' by the 'creeping mist' taking over the landscape: 'The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face, | Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still' (5; 7-8). The image of a 'face-cloth', used to cover the face of a dead person, is startlingly visceral and claustrophobic.[27] The atmosphere has thickened noticeably, and reaching down to touch the earth, it becomes suffocating. This stands in stark contrast to the way that Guinevere remembers the former presence of Arthur: 'I thought I could not breathe in that fine air | That pure severity of perfect light' (640-1). The atmosphere surrounding Arthur in her memory was more rarefied, suggestive of air at altitude, lacking in oxygen and unable to support human life. The image of the face-cloth at the beginning of 'Guinevere' is the first in a series of metaphorical associations between fabric, breath, and the surrounding atmosphere: throughout the final two idylls, air is gaining in substantiality.

This increasingly substantial atmosphere seems to be directly related to the extent that the gossip and rumour besieging Lancelot and Guinevere have by this point been substantiated by the proof of the couple's infidelity. The thickening atmosphere may be read as the physical realisation of the rumour that has been instrumental in disintegrating Camelot, and which has been related to the atmospheric breezes

[27] 'face cloth, n.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 12 September 2018].

throughout *Idylls*. In 'Merlin and Vivien' we were told that King Mark 'had heard a wandering voice, | A minstrel of Caerleon' tell of the love between Lancelot and Guinevere, thus demonstrating how far the rumours had become widely dispersed by the middle of *Idylls* (8-9). In 'Pelleas and Ettare', the vengeful Pelleas states that he will become 'like a poisonous wind […] to blast | And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen' (557-58), and this atmospheric association is confirmed in 'Guinevere' with the 'rumour wildly blown about' (151). Gossip and rumour are spoken on the breath, and, when spoken, seem to disappear into the air, as mists and winds seem to appear out of the air and can then be breathed in. As the rumours and gossip spoken at Camelot have now been substantiated by the proof of Guinevere and Lancelot's affair, so the atmosphere in which they have continued to exist begins to become more substantial.

Inextricably linked as he is to Camelot, Arthur disintegrates as it does, in inverse relation to the solidifying atmosphere of gossip that has taken the place of a healthy kingdom. In fact, by the end of 'Guinevere', Arthur actually seems to have become less substantial than the surrounding atmosphere:

> The moony vapour rolling round the King,
> Who seemed the phantom of a Giant in it,
> Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray
> And grayer, till himself became as mist
> Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom. (597-601)

While the 'moony vapour' gains in materiality, Arthur seems to become more ghostlike. The repetitions of 'fold by fold' and 'gray and grayer' suggest layers: as each fold turns about him, so he becomes less distinct within a thick mist. 'Fold' is an important word for Tennyson, occurring twenty-seven times in *Idylls*, and eleven times in *In Memoriam*, most memorably in stanza XXII:

> But where the path we walk'd began
> To slant the fifth autumnal slope,
> As we descended following Hope,
> There sat the Shadow fear'd of man;

Who broke our fair companionship,
And spread his mantle dark and cold,
And wrapt thee formless in the fold,
And dull'd the murmur on thy lip,

And bore thee where I could not see
Nor follow, tho' I walk in haste,
And think, that somewhere in the waste
The Shadow sits and waits for me. (9-20)

Like Arthur in 'Guinevere', here Hallam becomes 'formless', while the 'dark and cold' 'mantle' of death has gained substance and power. When he dies, Hallam disappears into the 'fold' of death. The pun on 'fold' – the spiritual 'sheepfold' of heaven and also the physical earth, the crease left in a field from ploughing – indicates both his spiritual change as he moves from earth to heaven, and the physical disintegration of his body in the earth.[28] This trace of *In Memoriam* emphasises Arthur's own journey towards death in *Idylls*, the inevitability of his 'moving ghostlike to his doom' reinforced by the lexical allusions to *In Memoriam*. The term 'fold' is used again by Arthur himself as he rallies for the despairing push towards the final battle in 'The Passing of Arthur', all the while remembering his final meeting with Guinevere, in the previous idyll:

Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way
Through this blind haze, which ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world. (75-78)

From Arthur's perspective, the 'blind haze' has spread throughout the world since the moment of his final meeting with Guinevere, yet, as I have shown, the 'creeping mist' has been notable since at least the beginning of 'Guinevere.' Arthur's experience of the disintegration of Camelot (and of himself) is different from Guinevere's.

Tennyson focuses increasingly on the atmospheric mists and winds in 'The Passing of Arthur', and at the same time he increases his focus on Arthur's own

[28] 'fold', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 9 October 2018]; As I explained in Chapter 4, Hallam was not actually buried in the earth, but in a tomb. However, Tennyson repeatedly imagines the disintegration of his body in the earth in *In Memoriam*.

breathing. As Arthur becomes less distinct in a thickening atmosphere, he finds it harder to breathe the more substantial air (as Guinevere did the thinner, 'fine air' of Arthur's former presence). There is a repeated focus on the physicality of Arthur's breath in this final idyll – 'drawing thicker breath', 'breathing hard', 'panted hard' – a focus that is Tennyson's own addition to the sources (316; 330; 344). Similarly, Christopher Ricks points out that in 'The Passing of Arthur', 'the mists are additions to Malory'.[29] From Leodogran's vision in 'The Coming of Arthur' of a 'phantom king', 'haze-hidden' (429), to Gareth's view of Camelot rising above the 'silver-misty morn' in 'Gareth and Lynette' (186), to Arthur's discovery of the crown in the 'misty moonshine' in 'Lancelot and Elaine' when he heard in his heart the strange 'murmurs' prophesying him king, the mists linger around Camelot (48; 55). Clyde de L. Ryals suggests that 'throughout "The Round Table" the haze and mist which enveloped the last lines of "The Coming of Arthur" recur only when there is allusion to those beings or entities which originate in the spiritual deep'.[30] However, it is possible to be more specific than this: the hazes and mists manifest themselves at moments that bring Arthur and Camelot together, and particularly in terms of Camelot's growth or fall. As the atmosphere in Camelot thickens, Arthur nears his passing and Camelot nears its end; in 'Guinevere' and 'The Passing of Arthur', breathing becomes more difficult and laboured. This focus on breath calls attention to Arthur as a living person, implicitly reminding the reader that although we do not know much about his beginning or his end, his body still appears to act in a familiar way when nearing death, thus humanising the mythic hero. He seems to be dying, but Tennyson is simultaneously drawing attention to the fact that he is yet living.

[29] *TP,* III, 552n.
[30] Ryals, p. 64.

The ‘creeping mist’ of ‘Guinevere’ becomes more pervasive in ‘The Passing of Arthur’, further breaking down bodily boundaries:

> A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea:
> Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
> Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
> With formless fear; and even on Arthur fell
> Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
> For friend and foe were shadows in the mist. (95-100)

The poisonous gossip and rumour that have, bit by bit, been ‘creeping’ into all the cracks in Camelot, are here manifested as the mist which has taken over eveything. As Vivien’s slanderous rumours have spread ‘confusion’ about what and who to believe in Camelot, so the mist now obscures clear interpretation. Even Arthur himself is not free from this confusion, which leaves him unable to tell ‘friend’ from ‘foe’ as both are ‘shadows in the mist.’ The mist has progressed from externally rendering Arthur ghostlike, to being internalised via the breath. It arrives into the body in a physical way, by breath and blood, and affects the centre of the physical body, the heart. Although the heart itself has not become ‘formless’, but is only ‘cold | With formless fear’, this image nonetheless evokes a sense of internal formlessness, as Camelot has been internally disintegrated by gossip and rumour. Having been internalised, the mist now works from inside the body to deconstruct its physicality. Hallam was formless in the ‘fold’ of the Shadow’s mantle, which had gained substantiality, whereas Arthur and his knights here begin to dislimn from the inside. This image is reminiscent of Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection*: ‘There is an aching hollowness in the bosom, a dark cold speck at the heart, an obscure and boding sense of a somewhat’, which, as Kirstie Blair has indicated, was admired and re-quoted by Hallam and his friends, and is therefore likely to have been familiar to Tennyson.[31] As Camelot unsubstantiates, something shadowy

[31] *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Aids to Reflection,* ed. by John Beer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993)*,* p. 24; Kirstie Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 8; This sense of formlessness reaches forward though a generation,

and previously insubstantial has gained its own materiality: rumour and gossip do not necessarily become true, but they are increasingly powerful.

This deathly mist, internalised via the breath, may also be inspired by miasmas (discussed in Chapter 1). When Tennyson first wrote these lines, which were to become part of 'The Passing of Arthur' (between 1833 and 1835), miasma theory was widely accepted. Much of the focus on breath in 'The Passing of Arthur' is concerned with the out-breath, rather than the in-breath. The out-breath can be heard; it can be formed into words (gossip, rumour, slander, vows, prophecy, enchantment), and it marks the moment of death, the final exhalation. In-breath – inspiration – is usually linked more with life giving and beginnings. It also, however, marks the process of aging as it is part of the circular in-out breath motion. Tennyson uses the in-breath here to signal the beginning of the dying process, and the end of Camelot. Arthur and his knights breathe in the 'deathwhite mist' – a manifestation of the poisonous gossip that has finally pulled Camelot apart – taking it into their bloodstreams and down to their hearts, and, by the end of the idyll, none but Bedivere still live. In this instance, the in-breath is a deadly foreboding of the final out-breath.

Last breaths

Arthur's dying breaths also permeate the poem's narrative rhythms. During the final idyll there are numerous changes of pace, punctuated by long pauses. Short moments are lingered over, yet the last battle is described with relative speed. As Arthur's breath ebbs away, Tennyson mirrors his dying body in the writing. The completion of the task Arthur has given to Bedivere to 'take Excalibur, | And fling him far into the middle mere' is withheld for a painfully long time: consumed by enraptured indecision,

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from the fogs of the nineteenth century to the 'haze' of modernism, which Connor examines in *The Matter of Air* (pp. 175-98).

Bedivere is unable to draw his eyes away from Excalibur, while Arthur waits in anxiety (204-5). Twice Bedivere goes down to the water's edge with the sword, only to return without having done Arthur's bidding. When Bedivere does finally manage to 'cast the brand away' (256), his actions are described with jarring speed:

> Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
> And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
> Among the bulrush beds, and clutched the sword,
> And strongly wheeled and threw it. (301-4)

The enjambment, anaphora, and the density of physically active verbs interrupt the frozen temporal sequence; reading the lines out loud may create a sense of breathlessness to mirror that of the running and leaping Bedivere. However, this pace is only kept up for a short time before it lengthens once again to pause at the crucial moment:

> The great brand
> Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
> And flashing round and round, and whirled in an arch,
> Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
> Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
> By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
> So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur. (304-10)

Once thrown, the sword seems to hang in the air; nearly twice as many lines are given to description of it in the air as were given to Bedivere running all the way to the water's edge and throwing it. For the last time Excalibur entrances both Bedivere and the reader, seeming to pause in the air before finally disappearing into the lake. This slowing at the highest point is, in fact, technically accurate. An object thrown into the air will follow the line of a parabola, decelerating as it reaches the top, to a point where it appears to be stationary, and then accelerating again on its descent. Its vertical movement is actually motionless for a brief moment, although the object continues its movement along the horizontal axis. Tennyson's note to line 306 confirms his explicit understanding and use of the shape: 'The extra syllable gives the rush of the sword as it

is whirled in parabolic curve'.[32] The sequence is concluded by Bedivere returning 'lightly […] to the King' to relate what he had seen at the water's edge (315).

The strange temporal irregularity of this sequence is suggestive of Cheyne-Stokes breathing, the typical change in regular breathing pattern that is often reported in a dying person. Cheyne-Stokes breathing, named after the physicians who first described it in the nineteenth century, John Cheyne and William Stokes, is a distinctive pattern of breathing that often occurs in the final days and hours of life: periods of fast, deep breathing give way to shallow, slower breathing, often with a complete temporary cessation of breath (an apnea). In 1818, Cheyne famously described the breathing of a dying man in detail, whom he diagnosed with apoplexy (a stroke):

> The only peculiarity in the last period of his illness, which lasted eight or nine days, was in the state of the respiration. For several days, his breathing was irregular; it would cease for a quarter of a minute, then it would become perceptible, though very low, then by degrees it became heaving and quick, and then it would gradually cease again. This revolution in the state of his breathing occupied about a minute, during which there were about thirty acts of respiration.[33]

This common deathbed phenomenon occurs especially in patients with long illnesses, or those who, like Arthur, are fatally wounded. The rhythms of Arthur's dying breaths are echoed in the world that is dying with him and the text that is describing that dying.

The way that the action of the poem imitates Arthur's dying breaths emphasises the collapse of his human, physical body – in the end the process of his dying is no different from any other person. However, it also demonstrates to the reader the transcendence of his human nature; his passing is also the passing of Camelot itself. The importance accorded to the moment of Excalibur's return reminds the reader that

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[32] *TP*, III, 556n.

[33] Quoted in J. M. S. Pearce, 'Cheyne-Stokes Respiration', *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry*, 72 (2002) <http://jnnp.bmj.com/content/72/5/595.full?sid=9ec14a55-8cdd-49f2-aac6-8bcfd028123f> [accessed 10 July 2015]; Cheyne-Stokes breathing can happen at times other than near death (for example; at high altitude, or in newborns with underdeveloped respiratory centres), but it is most often associated with dying.

although this is a moment that, temporally, passes quickly, it marks an irreversible change both in terms of Arthur's own life, and (therefore) also in the life of the Round Table. Tennyson had already anticipated this nearly two hundred lines earlier, at the end of the final battle:

> And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
> Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
> Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs
> In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
> Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.
>
> Last, as by some one deathbed after wail
> Of suffering, silence follows, or through death
> Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,
> Save for some whisper of the seething seas,
> A dead hush fell. (113-22)[34]

The action of the battle dies away and is superseded by the long description and layered analogy of the quiet aftermath. The reference to the last breath and following silence in a deathbed scene suggests rhythms of breath both on a great and an intimate scale. Much in 'The Passing of Arthur' is about Arthur looking back at his own life now that it is almost over. That his life is inextricably linked to Camelot and the dissolution of the Round Table makes the changes all the greater, as they form a part of more than just an individual life. This is accentuated by the focus on human voices and breath throughout the battle and the long process of deaths: 'shouts […] oaths, insult […] monstrous blasphemies […] labouring of the lungs […] cryings for the light, moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.' The final anthropomorphic 'whisper of the seething seas' heightens the otherwise total silence, and is a forewarning of 'the stillness of the dead world's winter dawn' that follows the moment of Arthur's passing at the end of the idyll (442).

[34] The 'cryings for the light' are a reminder of 'an infant crying for the light: | And with no language but a cry' in LIV of *In Memoriam*, once again bringing Tennyson's own experience of grief back into the poem.

After returning Excalibur to the lake, Bedivere then takes Arthur on his back, and carries him to the water's edge:

> But, as he walked, King Arthur panted hard,
> Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
> When all the house is mute. So sighed the King,
> Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick, quick!
> I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'
> But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
> Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walked,
> Larger than human on the frozen hills. (344-51)

Everything is not as it should be at this point. Breath, which is usually insubstantial, has here become metaphorically substantial, like the thickening atmosphere of the final idylls, taking the place of physical clothes. Breath is also usually internal, or at least quick to dissipate on exiting the body, but has here become a physical, presumably visual, thing. Of course, this is taking place in winter, surrounded by 'frozen hills' and 'icy caves', so breath would be more visible and might appear to go further and linger longer outside the body, yet it is still a striking image, and one that does not occur in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (351; 354).[35] This passage recalls section V of *In Memoriam* – 'In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er, | Like coarsest clothes against the cold' (9) – an echo that suggests the difficulty of finding appropriate words. As words are the 'coarsest clothes' in *In Memoriam,* the most basic protection against grief, so breath formed into words in Camelot is often inadequate (as proof, as vows, as commemoration).

The moment, in which Bedivere (carrying Arthur on his back) is 'clothed with his breath,' happens shortly after Bedivere has been tried and tested in returning Excalibur to the lake. One could read his earlier reluctance to dispose of the sword as a reluctance to allow Arthur to die or to leave. By holding onto Excalibur, Bedivere

[35] There is, however, an antecedent to this moment in Tennyson's 'Supposed Confessions of a Second-rate Sensitive Mind' (1830): 'Or breathe into the hollow air, | Whose chillness would make visible | Her subtil, warm, and golden breath' (ll. 58-60).

appears to be holding onto Arthur's breath; when he finally rids himself of the sword, our attention is drawn to the failing breath of the King. Arthur's panted 'muttering and murmuring at his ear, "Quick, quick"!' is also an articulation of still being 'quick' (rather than dead), and reminds both Bedivere and the reader that this state of being alive is slipping 'quick[ly]' away. Thus it is particularly poignant that, in this passage, the phrase 'clothed with his breath' is somewhat unclear. While it is definitely Bedivere who is 'clothed' with the breath, exactly whose breath this is appears to be deliberately ambiguous. Malory's Sir Bedivere also carries Arthur on his back, although in Malory's version of this episode there is no mention of breath. Tennyson's decision to include this aspect is, however, evident from the early manuscripts of his *Morte d'Arthur*:

> But ever as he went King Arthur breathed
> Against his shoulder heavily like one
> That hath not full an hour left to live.
> So stept he carefully from ledge to ledge
> Wrapt in his breath, and shunning where the rock
> Looked brighter glazed with ice, made firm his foot
> On juts of slippery crag that rang like tin.[36]

The decision to use Arthur's breath to emphasise his diminishing life is less subtly stated in this early version, but the ambiguity about whose breath it is that 'clothes' (or 'wraps') Bedivere is already evident. It is Arthur's breathing, rather than Bedivere's, on which Tennyson focuses in this passage; Arthur breathes 'heavily' and 'against [Bedivere's] shoulder,' leading the eye of the reader to make the connection between this heavy out-breath and the encompassing breath in which Bedivere is 'wrapped' four lines later. The way that Arthur breathes against Bedivere's shoulder in this early manuscript version of the passage may be read as an alternative to the wandering breath in 'Guinevere', which makes its way 'o'er her neck, | And in the darkness o'er her

[36] Quoted in *TP*, II, 14n.

fallen head': Bedivere, like Guinevere, is seeing Arthur for the last time, and Arthur's breath being breathed against him serves as a reminder of this. The focus on Arthur's breath is maintained in the final version in 'The Passing of Arthur', in which Arthur 'pants', 'mutters', and 'murmurs', but it is more elusive.

There is a proleptic verbal parallel of the image of Bedivere 'Clothed with his breath' at the moment that Bedivere decides for the second time not to throw the sword away: 'So spake he, clouded with his own conceit' (278). At this earlier point, before he has managed to cast the sword away, he is in complete stasis, unable to act. However, when carrying Arthur on his back he is no longer 'clouded with his own conceit,' but is 'clothed' with a breath that may be his own or that of the King, and which is, in fact, possibly both. Is there a sense that, having done Arthur's bidding in finally throwing the sword into the lake, Bedivere is now reintegrated, the last of Arthur's dissolving Round Table? One might consider the breath as a mantle of sorts: having ensured that his knight has cast away the material sword Arthur is able to pass on his teaching, the mantle of his work on earth, to Bedivere. As he comes to the end of his own breathing life, Arthur attempts to breathe the future into life, and Bedivere is that future. We already know, from the beginning of 'The Passing of Arthur', that Bedivere will be the one to tell the story of Camelot when he is in 'the white winter of his age' (4). Arthur is here ensuring that his story will be told, and that Camelot will be commemorated.

Commemoration

'The Coming of Arthur' was about finding out whether Arthur is real or not; 'The Passing of Arthur' it is about proving that he was real. Bedivere's concern that the physical sword may be necessary to give truth to verbal stories of Arthur and his

knights in the future (as otherwise all that would be left is 'empty breath | And rumours of a doubt') is central to this possibility of proof. Bedivere worries that without the physical object to prove to future listeners what had taken place, Arthur himself and all his feats would disintegrate into unproved rumour. Bedivere has learned to be wary of rumour – in 'The Coming of Arthur' he found himself defending Arthur against 'slander [that] breathed against the King' and the 'many rumours' that surrounded him – and he fears that something as elusive and ephemeral as the breath cannot, or should not, commemorate Arthur to posterity (176). If there are no physical things to show for Arthur's reign, Bedivere worries, then how can anyone in the future prove that Camelot once existed? Breath seems to be insubstantial and vague, and has been shown throughout *Idylls* to be potentially untrustworthy. However, it is also powerful, and if it is untrustworthy in *Idylls*, it is still listened to and acted upon. The gossip and rumour throughout *Idylls* might have been shifting and unreliable, but they were instrumental in the downfall of Camelot. Can breath therefore be trusted to rebuild a kingdom in memory, and to commemorate it?

Despite the fact that breath has been gaining in substantiality, particularly in the final two idylls, Excalibur still represents an ideal of material permanence. Arthur asks Bedivere to take the decisive action of casting away the sword in a manner that emphasises this distinction, telling him to 'take Excalibur, | […] and lightly bring me word' (204-6). Bedivere repeats that he will 'bring thee word,' as does Arthur at the next command: 'and lightly bring me word' (212; 249). It is only with the threat of physical violence that Bedivere finally casts away the sword, and is able to come back and 'speak out' about what happened when he did so. Arthur's commands to Bedivere create a situation in which he appears to be expected to swap the physical sword for mere words. Bedivere therefore cannot help but see the act as an exchange or

transaction – he has taken the sword and can only bring words.[37] In fact, Arthur is following the order of the sword itself, and has known that this moment would come since 'The Coming of Arthur':

> on one side,
> Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,
> 'Take me,' but turn the blade and ye shall see,
> And written in the speech ye speak yourself,
> 'Cast me away!' ('The Coming of Arthur', 300-4)

Hair states that while Bedivere wants to 'preserve Excalibur, "Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings" (269), its texts fixed and unchanging,' Arthur 'insists on realising in action the imperative, "Cast me away!", and it is he who challenges Bedivere to bring the text to life'.[38] There is a tension in *Idylls* between the poisonous effects of articulated breath as gossip and the need to rely on articulated breath as the only medium for gaining some sense of reintegration as Camelot falls apart. In this test Bedivere must choose to trust Arthur, and must abandon the substantive in favour of the seemingly insubstantive.

Although the reader is implicitly reminded throughout *Idylls* not to trust the spoken word fully, what has become evident by 'The Passing of Arthur' is that words spoken aloud can be enduring. There are many different things said about Arthur in the first idyll, none of which may be true (and certainly not all of them can be), but what persists is that Arthur's past is intriguing. Just because none of the stories are proven, it does not mean that they are forgotten.[39] Inga Bryden has pointed out that the Victorians became particularly interested in the end of Arthur's life and in the way that he would be commemmorated:

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[37] Yet, in *Idylls,* the image of a sword has been associated with destructive speech, most memorably in 'Pelleas and Ettare.' Is there a suggestion, therefore, of casting away the sharp words of gossip to be able to 'pass on' at the end of *Idylls*?
[38] Hair, p. 162.
[39] Remember that Geraint's opinion of Guinevere is changed forever by what he hears spoken about her.

> The death and memorialization of Arthur was one of the most popular aspects of the legend in Victorian Britain, unsurprisingly perhaps, given the social concern about provision of public burial sites and the visibility of rituals surrounding death; the cult of commemoration.[40]

Tennyson reveals underlying cultural pressures about passing on and moving to the future. The ending of *Idylls* is complicated by the fact of Arthur's uncertain 'passing.' As is implied by the change in title of the final idyll ('Morte d'Arthur' to 'The Passing of Arthur') Tennyson is keen to ensure that Arthur's 'passing' is as ambiguous as his 'coming'. Having carried Arthur on his back to the sea's edge, Bedivere helps him onto a barge, and watches from the shore as the barge moves out to sea and disappears into the distance:

> Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
> Even to the highest he could climb, and saw,
> Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
> Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,
> Down that long water opening on the deep
> Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
> From less to less and vanish into light. (462-68)

The lexis and repetition here draw out complexities in the meaning of 'pass' in this final idyll. Passing is not a clear and simple action, but an oblique one, and Tennyson seems at pains throughout *Idylls* to keep it so. Certainly, Tennyson is responding in some measure to Malory's now-legendary statement in the final book of *Le Morte D'Arthur*, that 'Kyng Arthur is not deed' but that 'in thys world he chaunged his lyf'.[41] Yet, the term 'pass' occurs ten times during 'The Passing of Arthur' in various forms. Perhaps, as Andrew Lynch suggests, 'in the end, Tennyson's fondness for interminate verbs of transition – "move", "pass", "come", "go" – again leaves the boundaries unclear, letting Arthur's life, like his barge, simply "pass on and on, and go" until out

[40] Inga Bryden, *Reinventing King Arthur: The Arthurian Legends in Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 375; Tennyson began work on what would become 'The Passing of Arthur' in 1833, before Victoria came to the throne, but the majority of *Idylls* was written and rewritten during her reign.
[41] *Malory,* I, 592.

of human sight'.[42] 'Pass', here, is partly a vivid enactment of Arthur's vanishing, and partly the recurrence of his dying and the 'passing on' of the tradition, the mantle (his breath), to Bedivere: by ensuring that someone will tell his story, 'morte' can be made into 'passing'.

As Christopher Baswell and William Sharpe emphasise, even those early Arthurian texts not overtly concerned with the passing – such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or the French cycles – are still preoccupied with loss.[43] The story of *Gawain* is framed by references to the fall of Troy, reminding the reader of the inevitable fall of empires and kingdoms through the ages, despite the fact that *Gawain* only focuses on a short moment in the life of Arthur's Round Table:

> Sithen the sege and the assaut was sesed at Troye,
> The borgh brittened and brent to brondes and askes,
> The tulk that the trammes of tresoun ther wroght
> Was tried for his tricherie, the trewest on erthe. (1-4)
>
> *Once the siege and assault of Troy had ceased,*
> *with the city a smoke-heap of cinders and ash,*
> *the traitor who contrived such betrayal there*
> *was tried for his treachery, the truest on earth.* (1-4)[44]

Baswell and Sharpe conclude, 'from this perspective, all such narratives concern the passing of Arthur. The narrator and reader live in the empty if long moment between loss and return, and the story is always aware of the loss that is to come.'[45]

Tennyson is preoccupied both with giving prominence to Arthur's passing and with maintaining a level of uncertainty surrounding it. One notable device that he uses is a repeated focus on breath, which draws attention to Arthur's dying (and therefore also to his having lived). Tennyson's final idyll is overtly concerned with the passing of

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[42] Andrew Lynch, '..."if indeed I go": Arthur's uncertain end in Malory and Tennyson', *Arthurian Literature,* 27 (2010), 19-32 (p. 32).
[43] Christopher Baswell and William Sharpe, 'Introduction', in *The Passing of Arthur: New Essays in Arthurian Tradition,* ed. by Christopher Baswell and William Sharpe (New York: Grand Publishing, 1988) pp. xi-xix (p. xii).
[44] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans. by Simon Armitage (New York: Norton, 2008) pp. 20-21.
[45] Baswell and Sharpe, p. xii.

Arthur, yet it is also concerned with the wider passing of the Round Table and with the change that occurs in the world when Arthur leaves it. Arthur himself knows this, and wonders if the 'dim cries' he can hear at the beginning of 'The Passing of Arthur' come from the world itself: 'doth all that haunts the waste and wild | Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?' (47; 48-49). Bedivere is also aware of the change that is to come when he states, near the end of 'The Passing of Arthur': 'But now the Round Table is dissolved | Which was an image of the mighty world' (402-3). His anxiety is confirmed after Arthur's barge has disappeared into the distance, leaving 'the stillness of the dead world's winter dawn' (442).

Bedivere's concern is in part about his own abilities: he sees himself as the 'old man' speaking 'in the aftertime | To all the people, winning reverence,' and he does not want to have to keep attempting to prove his story without a physical object to which to turn (275-76). He is anxious about how he himself might be regarded in the future, and whether he will actually be capable of telling the story. Bedivere is not alone in his self-doubt. As Kincaid has stated, 'Bedivere is no Horatio who might be trusted to tell the story and thus provide continuity and a guarantee of the efficacy of the tragic effect. Bedivere will get it all wrong for sure'.[46] In fact, we already know that Bedivere's concerns are unneccessary, as we are offered the story retrospectively, and we therefore know that he will 'let [his] voice | Rise like a fountain', as Arthur advises (416-17). 'The Passing of Arthur' is introduced as a dramatic monologue of sorts, vivified by the ancient Bedivere's breath:

> That story which the bold Sir Bedivere,
> First made and latest left of all the knights,
> Told, when the man was no more than a voice
> In the white winter of his age, to those
> With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds. (1-5)

[46] James R. Kincaid, 'Tennyson's Ironic Camelot: Arthur Breathes His Last', *Philological Quarterly*, 56 (1977), 241-45 (p. 243).

By the end of his life Bedivere's body has dwindled, leaving only the voice, which continues to relate the story. Throughout 'The Passing of Arthur' we know that he will survive to tell the story despite his own self-doubt, although this does not diminish the anxiety about proof and commemoration at the moment of his testing.

Bedivere's concern is furthermore to do with Tennyson's own uneasy awareness about the fact that he is writing tales of a culture that is primarily oral. There is writing in Arthur's court – the 'hoary chamberlain' to King Leodogran tells how the story of Arthur's coming had been written 'in one great annal-book, where after-years | Will learn the secret of our Arthur's birth', there is Merlin's book in 'Merlin and Vivien', and there is also writing on the sword itself – but Camelot relies predominantly on the spoken word ('The Coming of Arthur', 147; 157-58). Connor states that,

> Historians of the passage from orality to literacy have suggested that the most important difference between a culture based upon sound and one based upon sight lies in the relation of language to temporality. For literate or, so to speak, 'sighted' cultures, words are thought of as forms of record, signs capable of capturing bits of the world and of experience, and holding them in place. In aural-oral cultures, words are events.[47]

Bedivere's concern that words are simply 'empty breath', and that they will not be able to act as a form of record, is therefore consistent with his status within a primarily oral culture. For him, words are events, and as a result are short-lived and thus unable to provide proof in the future.

I have said that the spoken word is most ubiquitous at Camelot in the form of unreliable and shifting gossip, which gains its own semblance of materiality in the fact of Lancelot and Guinevere's affair. However, Camelot was founded on another form of breath – the fixed words of the vows that drew Arthur's fellowship together – and there

[47] Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 15.

have been traces of this more materially loaded speech at other points in *Idylls*. In 'The Holy Grail' Percivale describes the way that,

> the living words
> Of so great men as Lancelot and our King
> Pass not from door to door and out again,
> But sit within the house. (709-12)

What this description of Lancelot and Arthur's speech suggests is both a sense of constancy (as opposed to the wandering gossip and rumour, which does frequently 'pass […] from door to door and out again'), and a sense of the words having agency themselves. The phrase, 'living words', from Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (which in turn responds to John Horne Tooke's 'winged words') suggests that words should almost function as human.[48] Angela Esterhammer states that Coleridge's phrase 'assigns an independent and even organic agency to language', and, at the end of the Preface to *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge elaborates: 'For if words are not THINGS, they are LIVING POWERS, by which the things of most importance to mankind are actuated, combined, and humanized'.[49] At the end of *Idylls*, Bedivere must trust that he will be capable of producing 'living words' rather than 'empty breath', and that Camelot will come (back) to life in his storytelling.

The situation for Tennyson's Bedivere (compared with Malory's Bedivere) is further complicated by the fact that the nineteenth century itself was no longer a world that was based on Biblical stories, but exhibited a growing understanding about the significance of physical evidence of a distant past. Tennyson was writing in the wake of the Higher Criticism and its repercussions, and at a time when advances in scientific understanding meant that the history of the world was vastly expanded (I discussed Tennyson's particular engagement with Lyell in the previous chapter): fossils and other

[48] Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, p. 7.
[49] Angela Esterhammer, *The Romantic Performative: Language and Action in British and German Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 166; Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, p. 10.

material proofs of earlier eras changed the way that history was viewed, overtaking the stories that had previously been relied upon.[50] As Rosenberg points out, *Idylls* was,

> written during a period when man's sense of time was undergoing a change as radical as that effected in his sense of space by Copernicus three centuries earlier. First geology and then evolution pushed back the origins of things from the imagined instant of Creation to unimaginably remote beginnings.[51]

Idylls represents a strange conflict of time, as is suggested by the age of Merlin's book in 'Merlin and Vivien,' which is:

> Writ in a language that has long gone by.
> So long, that mountains have arisen since
> With cities on their flanks – thou read the book!
> And every margin scribbled, crost, and crammed
> With comment, densest condensation, hard
> To mind and eye. (672-77)

Matthew Margini describes Merlin's book as 'a text of cosmological twoness, simultaneously manifesting something like the order of human civilization – the sloppy palimpsest of things "scribbled, crost, and cramm'd" in the margins – and something like the resistant, unknowable, ahistoric order of nature.' He points out that the fact that 'mountains have arisen since [the book was written] | With cities on their flanks' evokes 'two different orders of time, one humanistic and one geologic'.[52] Merlin's book, like *Idylls* iself, relies on more than one sense of historical record. Human record was verbal, subjective, and (potentially) unreliable compared to the solidity of geological evidence and other emerging scientific knowledge, but, in the end, Tennyson

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[50] The emphasis of the Higher Criticism might be thought to indicate the great power of narrative (written or spoken) over empirical fact. On the emergence of higher critical perspectives and concurrent rise of nineteenth-century fiction, see: Jennifer Stevens, *The Historical Jesus and the Literary Imagination, 1860-1920* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010); Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England 1838-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 4; Susan E. Colón, *Victorian Parables* (London: Continuum, 2012); W. David Shaw, 'Poetry and Religion', in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman and Antony A. Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 457-74. Robert Browning's 'A Death in the Desert' focuses in particular on the power of the spoken word, imagining St John's dying testament implicitly from a post-higher critical viewpoint.

[51] Rosenberg, *The Fall of Camelot*, p. 34.

[52] Matthew Margini, 'The Beast with the Broken Lance: Humanism and Posthumanism in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*', *Victorian Poetry*, 53 (2015), 171-192 (p. 186).

seems to be steering a way towards some kind of human commemoration, in all the compound, unsatisfactory alternatives. Bedivere's internal struggle about the value of breath as evidence in fact mirrors Tennyson's recurrent concerns in *In Memoriam*:

> I trust I have not wasted breath:
> I think we are not wholly brain,
> Magnetic mockeries; not in vain,
> Like Paul with beasts, I fought with Death;
>
> Not only cunning casts in clay:
> Let Science prove we are, and then
> What matters Science unto men,
> At least to me? I would not stay. (CXX)

Like Tennyson himself, Bedivere is not keen on 'wasting' breath, but in the end must trust that he does not offer a spoken testimony of the dead 'in vain'.

CONCLUSION

Following Tennyson's death in 1892, his physician, Dr. George Dabbs, pinned a bulletin to the gates of Aldworth House containing a vivid description of the poet's final hours of life:

> Nothing could have been more striking than the scene during the last few hours. On the bed a figure of breathing marble, flooded and bathed in the light of the full moon streaming through the oriel window; his hand clasping the Shakespeare which he had asked for but recently, and which he had kept by him to the end; the moonlight, the majestic figure as he lay there, 'drawing thicker breath,' irresistibly brought to our minds his own 'Passing of Arthur.'[1]

Dabbs's depiction here merges the physicality of dying ('drawing thicker breath') with an aestheticised literary memory (further complicated by the fact that, in *Idylls*, as I have shown, Tennyson emphasises the physicality of Arthur's dying breaths). While Tennyson was still breathing, he was already being imagined as a statue, a memorial. Dabbs places him, as Coleridge placed Wordsworth, 'in the choir | Of ever-enduring men' ('To William Wordsworth', 49-50). Tennyson's doubts and anxieties about commemoration, articulated in *Idylls*, are here either being answered and allayed, or masked beneath the 'majestic figure' he now makes.

During Tennyson's funeral, as Samantha Matthews describes, the music included 'vocal settings of two late Tennyson poems meditating on death, "Crossing the Bar" and "The Silent Voices"'. This brought an uncanny quality to the proceedings, as 'The Laureate's voice was prolonged beyond the grave, a miracle daringly registered by allusion to Hebrews 10: 4: "This seemed, indeed, the very voice of the Laureate, to

[1] Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: a memoir*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1897), pp. 428-29.

which those thousands breathlessly listened. 'He being dead, yet speaketh'."'[2] The contemporary commentator, whom Matthews is quoting here, inverts the natural relation between life, breath, and death: the living become breathless, and the dead speak. Tennyson's own funeral allowed the dead to be 'heard again' (*IM,* XVIII. 20), and, as with Dabbs's bulletin, it appears natural to Tennyson's contemporaries to frame his cultural significance with reference to states of breathing (thicker breath and breathless listening).

In both respects, the events surrounding Tennyson's death continue the concerns in his poetry which this study has sought to bring out: in particular, the desire to restore the dead by breathing them back to life and speech, and the – in some ways contrary – desire to breathe them on into a glorious afterlife and so glimpse in the marble the breath of life, rather than the 'thicker' breaths of expiration. Breath focuses, in Coleridge and Tennyson, the tension between commemoration and promise, material and spiritual, a dubious certainty and a doubtful hope. What emerges is a possible correspondence with the relation between spoken and written. In each chapter of this thesis, there are instances where breath epitomises the inimitable speech of particular people: Coleridge's descriptions of Wordsworth in 'To William Wordsworth', and the hypnotic protagonist of the *Ancient Mariner*; Coleridge's own speech, which leaves a lasting impression on everyone, including Hallam; Hallam's speech, remembered by Tennyson, who creates a space for it to be 'heard again', and, in the meantime, allows Coleridge's speech also to be 'heard again'; and Arthur's speech in *Idylls,* which is influenced by Hallam (and even Coleridge). Writing the breath might risk turning the speaker into a 'figure of breathing marble', fixing the inspiration of the spoken, and yet

[2] Samantha Matthews, *Poetical Remains: Poets' Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 278.

to rely exclusively on the spoken, in the gossip-infected world of Camelot, may be to subject the inimitable to distortion and misrepresentation.

There is evidence, moreover, that the breath, as understood by Coleridge and Tennyson, in the light of their period's scientific discoveries, continued to exert influence on other poets. Word searches alone reveal that the term 'breath' occurs with notable frequency in nineteenth-century poetry.[3] Out of the culture of new understandings of breath and breathing in the nineteenth century (as demonstrated by my research), it became possible for nineteenth-century poets to refer to the breath in ways that may seem unobtrusive, passing, but which also carry more complex burdens of meaning. When Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for example, gives her final answer to the question 'How do I love thee?', in 1850, she writes: 'I love thee with the breath, | Smiles, tears, of all my life!' The 'breath' here is not only a sign for 'life' (which is soon to be conveyed again by the words 'all my life'); it also works to communicate an intensification of that principle (the life of my life), which then more powerfully throws into relief the thought of the final line: 'and, if God choose, | I shall but love thee better after death.'[4] Thomas Hood's 'The Death-Bed' (1831) begins with an apparently simple description of the final breaths of a dying person, but he, likewise, offers something more than this:

> WE watch'd her breathing thro' the night,
> Her breathing soft and low,
> As in her breast the wave of life
> Kept heaving to and fro![5]

[3] For example, 'breath' appears sixty-seven times in the work of Robert Browning, seventy in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, seventy-eight in Christina Rossetti, a hundred and thirty-four in Tennyson, and a hundred and ninety-nine in Algernon Charles Swinburne. See *Literature Online* <www.literature.proquest.com> [accessed 22 October 2018].
[4] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, '*Sonnets from the Portuguese* XLIII: How do I love thee?', in *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology,* ed. by Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 91.
[5] Thomas Hood, 'The Death-Bed', in *The Oxford Book of Nineteenth-Century English Verse*, ed. by John Hayward (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 425.

Hood uses the term 'breathing' in the first line to mean the physical action (keeping the body alive); the half rhyme of 'breathing' and 'heaving', and the closeness of 'breast' with 'breath', emphasise this physical aspect. Yet, the 'wave of life' draws attention to a secondary meaning of 'breathing' as a metaphor for living, as the would-be-mourners 'watch' the still-living person through the night.

Throughout this thesis I have examined compound uses of breath and breathing in relation to literal and poetic inspiration. We can see these multiple meanings extend in new and different ways in the nineteenth century. For instance, Emily Dickinson turns to an image of a kind of mechanisation of breathing to illustrate the power of the poet:

> I breathed enough to take the Trick –
> And now, removed from Air –
> I simulate the Breath, so well –
> That One, to be quite sure –
>
> The Lungs are stirless – must descend
> Among the Cunning Cells –
> And touch the Pantomime – Himself,
> How numb, the Bellows feels![6]

Dickinson's poem chimes, in its way, with Poe's 'Loss of Breath', which I discussed in my introduction; like Poe, she describes an impossible scenario of breathless living, but here it seems to become a sign of the poet's power to speak outside of the usual principles of life – the breath a principle of life which, if you learn the 'Trick' of it (in writing poetry: 'I simulate the Breath, so well', 'the Pantomime'), leaves you no longer dependent on the air. Conversely, Algernon Charles Swinburne focuses explicitly on the poet's need to breathe so as to be able to continue to create:

> Between two seas the sea-bird's wing makes halt,
> Wind-weary; while with lifting head he waits
> For breath to reinspire him from the gates

[6] *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Thomas H. Johnson (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), p. 124.

That open still toward sunrise on the vault
High-domed of morning, and in flight's default
With spreading sense of spirit anticipates
What new sea now may lure beyond the straits
His wings exulting that her winds exalt
And fill them full as sails to seaward spread,
Fulfilled with fair speed's promise. Pass, my song,
Forth to the haven of thy desire and dread,
The presence of our lord, long loved and long
Far off above beholden, who to thee
Was as light kindling all a windy sea.[7]

Swinburne's bird is 'between two seas', pausing for 'breath to reinspire him' on his way to a 'new sea'; he pauses both for literal re-inspiration (a physical breath to help him on his journey, breathed in from the 'windy sea') and, in his function as a representation of the poet himself, for new poetic inspiration. The placement of this sonnet when published, in *Songs of the Springtides* (1880), emphasises these multiple meanings – it appears between three sea-related poems and the 'Birthday Ode' to Victor Hugo (furthermore, it is not listed in the table of contents, and is thus a surprise to the reader). John A. Walsh notes that the 'two seas represent the twin founts of Swinburne's inspiration. On the one side is the triptych of sea-studies, the sea of salt waters, and primal natural forces. On the other side is the sea of literature, represented here by Hugo'.[8] Swinburne, in this sonnet, combines lines of inherited poetic inspiration with a suggestion of inspiration that can be gained from the natural world, but which, in the latter case, must be understood also as a literal breath, inhaled from the atmospheric air of that wider world.

This study has revealed the multiplicity and complexity of air and breath, and with that comes new understanding of the nature of relationship (with its own multiplicities and complexities). In every chapter I have traced forms of relationship

[7] *Swinburne's Collected Poetical Works*, 2 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1927), I, 635.
[8] John A. Walsh, '"Quivering Web of Living Thought": Conceptual Networks in Swinburne's Songs of the Springtides', in *A. C. Swinburne and the Singing World: New Perspectives on the Mature Work*, ed. by Yisrael Levin (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 29-54 (p. 34).

and symbiosis that are created through breathing: between the inner and the outer, between the self and the other, and between the self and the wider atmosphere. More specifically, I have considered the breathing relationship between friends, family and lovers; between poets; between a mariner and the surrounding environment of winds and breezes, which are, essentially, the breaths of the world; between storyteller and audience, or speaker and listener; between a king and his subjects; between a kingdom and the people that live in it; and even between the living and the dead. This last is both a physical act (understood in terms of the growing awareness that people are continuously breathing in others' breath and bodies, and even the detritus from their lungs), and a literary one (allowing a voice to continue, a relationship to not be lost, and a poet's words to continue to have influence).

Several strands of thinking about the breath in this thesis have touched on questions of legacy or afterlife (whether the afterlife of a friend or fellow poet, or the way that stories, personal or national, live upon the breath of others), and on the ways that late eighteenth-century developments in understanding about the breath were inherited by the nineteenth century. The Victorians in particular were, in this respect, not only great commemorators; they were also focused on legacies for the future – ways, culturally, to breathe new life into the material and spiritual lives of subsequent generations. And so it is apt that, drawing on the work I have begun in this thesis, further studies of breath and breathing in this period may remain to be written.

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